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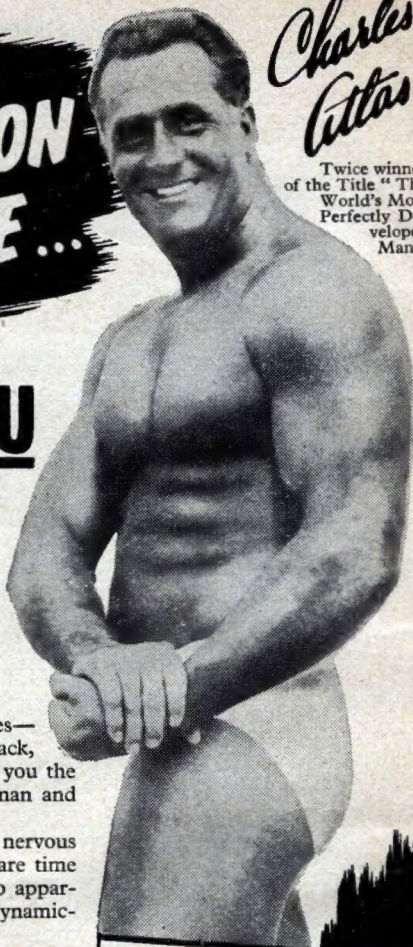
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UN-MAN BY POUL ANDERSON

Frank Wm. Barron.

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UN-MAN

By POUL ANDERSON

The Un-Man, like an idea, could be killed many times—and still lived vigorously and actively. But to live at all, he had to be vigorous and active!

CHAPTER I.

THEY were gone, their boat whispering into the sky with all six of them aboard. Donner had watched them from his balcony—he had chosen the apartment carefully with a view to such features—as they walked out on the landing flange and entered the shell. Now their place was vacant and it was time for him to get busy.

For a moment hesitation was in him. He had waited many days for this chance, but a man does not willingly enter a potential trap. His eyes strayed to the picture on his desk. The darkly beautiful young woman and the child in her arms seemed to be looking at him, her lips were parted as if she were about to speak. He wanted to press the button that animated the film, but didn't quite dare. Gently, his finger stroked the glass over her cheek.

"Jeanne," he whispered. "Jeanne, honey."

He got to work. His colorful lounging pajamas were exchanged for a gray outfit that would be inconspicuous against the walls of the building. An ordinary featureless mask, its sheen carefully dulled to nonreflection, covered his face. He clipped a flat box of tools to his belt and painted his fingertips with collodion. Picking up a reel of cord in one hand, he returned to the balcony.

From here, two hundred and thirty-four stories up, he had a wide view of the Illinois plain. As far as he could see, the land rolled green with corn, hazing into a far horizon out of which the great sky lifted. Here and there, a clump of trees had been planted, and the white streak of an old highway crossed the field, but otherwise it was one immensity of growth. The holdings of Midwest Agricultural reached beyond sight.

On either hand, the apartment building lifted sheer from the trees and gardens of its park. Two miles long, a city in its own right, a mountain of walls and windows, the unit dominated the plain, sweeping heavenward in a magnificent arrogance that ended sixty-six stories above Donner's flat. Through the light prairie wind that fluttered his garments, the man could hear a low unending hum, muted pulsing of machines and life—the building, itself like a giant organism.

There were no other humans in sight. The balconies were so designed as to screen the users from view of neighbors on the same level, and anyone in the park would find his upward glance blocked by trees. A few brilliant points of light in the sky were airboats, but that didn't matter.

Donner fastened his reel to the edge of the balcony and took the end of the cord in his fingers. For still another moment he stood, letting the sunlight and wind pour over him, filling his eyes with the reaching plains and the high white-clouded heaven.

He was a tall man, his apparent height reduced by the width of shoulders and chest, a curious rippling grace in his movements. His naturally yellow hair had been dyed brown, and contact lenses made his blue eyes dark, but otherwise there hadn't been much done to his face—the broad forehead, high cheekbones, square jaw, and jutting nose were the same. He smiled wryly behind the blank mask, took a deep breath, and swung himself over the balcony rail.

The cord unwound noiselessly, bearing him down past level after level. There was a risk involved in this daylight burglary—someone might happen to glance around the side wall of a balcony and spot him, and even the custom of privacy would hardly keep them from notifying the unit police. But the six he

was after didn't time their simultaneous departures for his convenience.

The looming façade slid past, blurred a little by the speed of his descent. One, two, three— He counted as he went by, and at the eighth story down tugged the cord with his free hand. The reel braked and he hung in midair.

A long and empty way down— He grinned and began to swing himself back and forth, increasing the amplitude of each arc until his soles were touching the unit face. On the way back, he grasped the balcony rail, just beyond the screening side wall, with his free hand. His body jerked to a stop, the impact like a blow in his muscles.

Still clinging to the cord, he pulled himself one-armed past the screen, over the rail, and onto the balcony floor. Under the gray tunic and the sweating skin, his sinews felt as if they were about to crack. He grunted with relief when he stood freely, tied the cord to the rail, and unclipped his tool case.

The needle of his electronic detector flickered. So—there was an alarm hooked to the door leading in from the balcony. Donner traced it with care, located a wire, and cut it. Pulling a small torch from his kit, he approached the door. Beyond its transparent plastic, the rooms lay quiet—a conventional arrangement of furniture, but it had a waiting quality over it.

Imagination, thought Donner impatiently, and cut the lock from the door. As he entered, the autocleaner sensed his presence and its dust-sucking wind whined to silence.

The man forced the lock of a desk and rifled through the papers within. One or two in code he slipped into his pocket, the rest were uninteresting. There must be more, though. Curse it, this was their regional headquarters!

His mental detector helped him about the apartment, looking for hidden safes. When he found a large mass buried in a wall, he didn't trouble with searching for the button to open it, but cut the plastic facing away. The gang would know their place had been raided, and would want to move. If they took another flat in the same building, Donner's arrangement with

the superintendent would come into effect; they'd get a vacancy which had been thoughtfully provided with all the spy apparatus he could install. The man grinned again.

Steel gleamed at him through the scorched and melted wall. It was a good safe, and he hadn't time to diddle with it. He plugged in his electric drill, and the diamond head gnawed a small hole in the lock. With a hypodermic he inserted a few cubic centimeters of levinité, and touched it off by a UHF beam. The lock jangled to ruin, and Donner opened the door.

He had only time to see the stet-gun within, and grasp the terrible fact of its existence. Then it spat three needles into his chest, and he whirled down into a roaring darkness.

CHAPTER II.

ONCE or twice he had begun to waken, stirring dimly toward light, and the jab of a needle had thrust him back. Now, as his head slowly cleared, they let him alone. And that was worse.

Donner retched and tried to move. His body sagged against straps that held him fast in his chair. Vision blurred in a huge nauseous ache, the six who stood watching him were a ripple of fever-dream against an unquiet shadow.

"He's coming around," said the thin man unnecessarily.

The heavy-set, gray-haired man in the conservative blue tunic glanced at his timepiece. "Pretty fast, considering how he was dosed. Healthy specimen."

Donner mumbled. The taste of vomit was bitter in his mouth. "Give him some water," said the bearded man.

The thin man's face was dead white against the shifting, blurring darkness of the room, and there was a fever in his eyes. "He doesn't rate it," he snarled "the—Un-man!"

"Get him some water," said the gray-haired one quietly. The skeletal younger slouched sulkily over to a chipped basin with an old-fashioned tap and drew a glassful.

Donner swallowed it greedily, letting it quench some of the dry fire in his

throat and belly. The bearded man approached with a hypo.

"Stimulant," he explained. "Bring you around faster." It bit into Donner's arm and he felt his heartbeat quicken. His head was still a keen pulsing pain, but his eyes steadied and he looked at the others with returning clarity.

"We weren't altogether careless," said the heavy-set man. "That stet-gun was set to needle anybody who opened the safe without pressing the right button first. And, of course, a radio signal was emitted which brought us back in a hurry. We've kept you unconscious till now."

Donner looked around him. The room was bare, thick with the dust and cobwebs of many years, a few pieces of old-style wooden furniture crouched in ugliness against the cracked plaster walls. There was a single window, its broken glass panes stuffed with rags, dirt so thick on it that he could not be sure if there was daylight outside. But it was probably after dark. The only illumination within was from a single fluoro in a stand on the table.

He must be in Chicago, Donner decided through a wave of sickness. One of the vast moldering regions that encompassed the inhabited parts of the dying city—deserted, not worth destroying as yet, the lair of rats and decay. Sooner or later, some agricultural outfit would buy up the nominal title from the government which had condemned the place and raze what had been spared by fire and rot. But it hadn't happened yet, and the empty slum was a good hideaway for—anybody.

Donner thought of those miles of ruinous buildings, wrapped in night, looming hollow against a vacant sky—dulled echoes in the cracked and grass-grown streets, the weary creak of a joist, the swift patter of feet and a glare of eyes from the thick dark, menace and loneliness farther than he could run.

Alone, alone. He was more alone here than in the outermost reaches of space—alone in darkness with his enemies ringing him in and death waiting behind the shadows. He knew starkly that he was going to die, and the thought was a surging pain.

Jeanne, Jeanne, my darling.

"You were registered at the unit as Bart Roberts," said the woman crisply. She was thin, almost as thin as the bitter-eyed young man beside her. The face was sharp and hungry, the hair close cropped, the voice harsh with purpose. "But your ID tattoo is a fake—it's a dye that comes off with acid. We got your thumbprint and that number on a check and called the bank central like in an ordinary verification, and the robofile said yes, that was Bart Roberts and the account was all right." She leaned forward, her face straining against the blur of night, and spat it at him: "Who are you really? Only a secret service man could get by with that kind of fake. Whose service are you in?"

"It's obvious, isn't it?" snapped the thin man. "He's not American Security. We know that. So he must be an Un-man."

The way he said the last word made it an ugly, inhuman sound. "*The Un-man!*" he repeated.

"Our great enemy," said the heavy-set one thoughtfully. "*The Un-man*—not just an ordinary operator, with human limitations, but the great and secret one who's made so much trouble for us."

He cocked his gray head and stared at Donner. "It fits what fragmentary descriptions we have," he went on. "But then, the U.N. boys can do a lot with surgery and cosmetics, can't they? And *the Un-man* has been killed several times. An operator was bagged in Hong-Kong only last month which the killer swore must be our enemy—he said nobody else could have led them such a chase."

That was most likely Weinberger, thought Donner. An immense weariness settled on him. They were so few, so desperately few, and one by one the Brothers went down into darkness. He was next, and after him—

"What I can't understand," said a fifth man—Donner recognized him as Colonel Samsey of the American Guard—"is why, if the U.N. Secret Service does have a corps of . . . uh . . . supermen, it should bother to disguise them to look all alike. So that we'll think we're dealing with an immortal?" He chuckled grimly. "Surely

they don't expect us to be rattled by that!"

"Not supermen," said the gray-haired one. "Enormously able, yes, but the Un-men aren't infallible—as witness this one." He stood before Donner, his legs spread and his hands on his hips. "Suppose you start talking. Tell us about yourself."

"I can tell you about your own selves," answered Donner. His tongue felt thick and dry, but the acceptance of death made him, all at once, immensely steady. "You are Roger Wade, president of Brain Tools Incorporated, and a prominent supporter of the Americanist Party." To the woman: "You are Marta Jennings, worker for the Party on a full-time basis. Your secretary, Mr. Wade"—his eyes roved to the gaunt young man—"is Rodney Borrow, Exogene Number—"

"Don't call me that!" Cursing, Borrow lunged at Donner. He clawed like a woman. When Samsey and the bearded man dragged him away, his face was death-white and he dribbled at the mouth.

"And the experiment was a failure," taunted Donner cruelly.

"Enough!" Wade slapped the prisoner, a ringing open-handed buffet. "We want to know something new, and there isn't much time. You are, of course, immunized against truth drugs—Dr. Lewin's tests have already confirmed that—but I assume you can still feel pain."

After a moment, he added quietly: "We aren't fiends. You know that we're—patriots." *Working with the nationalists of a dozen other countries!* thought Donner with a terrible sardonicism. "We don't want to hurt or kill unnecessarily."

"But first we want your real identity," said the bearded man, Lewin. "Then your background of information about us, the future plans of your chief, and so on. However, it will be sufficient for now if you answer a few questions pertaining to yourself—residence and so on."

Oh, yes, thought Donner, the weariness like a monstrous weight on his soul. *That'll do. Because then they'll find Jeanne and Bobby, and bring them here, and—*

Lewin wheeled forth a lie detector. "Naturally, we don't want our time wasted by false leads," he said.

"It won't be," replied Donner. "I'm not going to say anything."

Lewin nodded, unsurprised, and brought out another machine. "This one generates low-frequency, low-voltage current," he remarked. "Quite painful. I don't think your will can hold out very long. If it does, we can always try prefrontal lobotomy; you won't have inhibitions then. But we'll give you a chance with this first."

He adjusted the electrodes on Donner's skin. Borrow licked his lips with a dreadful hunger.

Donner tried to smile, but his mouth felt stiff. The sixth man, who looked like a foreigner somehow, went out of the room.

There was a tiny receiver in Donner's skull, behind the right mastoid. It could only pick up messages of a special wave form, but it had its silencing uses, too. After all, electric torture is a common form of inquisition, and very hard to bear.

He thought of Jeanne, and of Bobby, and of the Brotherhood. He wished that the last air he was to breathe wasn't stale and dusty.

The current tore him with a convulsive anguish. His muscles jerked against the straps and he cried out. Then the sensitized communicator blew up in a jagged hail of splinters, releasing a small puff of fluorine.

The image Donner carried into death was that of Jeanne, smiling and bidding him welcome home.

CHAPTER III.

BARNEY ROSENBERG drove along a dim, rutted trail toward the sheer loom of the escarpment. Around its corner lay Dry-gulch. But he wasn't hurrying. As he got closer, he eased the throttle of his sandcat and the engine's purr became almost inaudible.

Leaning back in his seat, he looked through the tiny plastiglass cab at the Martian landscape. It was hard to understand that he would never see it again.

Even here, five miles or so from the colony, there was no trace of man save himself and his engine and the blurred track through sand and bush. Men had

come to Mars on wings of fire, they had hammered out their cities with a clan-gorous brawl of life, mined and smelted and begun their ranches, trekked in sandcats and airsuits from the polar bogs to the equatorial scrubwoods—and still they had left no real sign of their passing. Not yet. Here a tin can or a broken tool, there a mummified corpse in the wreck of a burst seal-tent, but sand and loneliness drifted over them, night and cold and forgetfulness. Mars was too old and strange for thirty years of man to matter.

The desert stretched away to Rosenberg's left, tumbling in steep drifts of sand from the naked painted hills. Off to the sharply curving horizon the desert marched, an iron barrenness of red and brown and tawny yellow, knife-edged shadows and a weird vicious shimmer of pale sunlight. Here and there a crag lifted, harsh with mineral color, worn by the passing of ages and thin gnawing wind to a fluted fantasy. A sandstorm was blowing a few miles off, a scud of dust hissing over stone, stirring the low gray-green brush to a sibilant murmur of dry branches. On his right the hills rose bare and steep, streaked with blue and green of copper ores, gashed and scored and murmurous with wind. He saw life, the dusty thornbushes and the high gaunt cactoids and a flicker of movement as a tiny leaper fled. In one of the precipices, a series of carved, time-blurred steps went up to the ruin of a cliff dwelling abandoned—how long ago?

Overhead the sky was enormous, a reaching immensity of deep greenish blue-violet, incredibly high and cold and remote. The stars glittered faintly in its abyss, the tiny hurtling speck of a moon less bright than they. A shrunken sun stood in a living glory of corona and zodiacal light, the winged disk of royal Egypt lifting over Mars. Near the horizon a thin layer of ice crystals caught the luminance in a chilly sparkle. There was wind, Rosenberg knew, a whimpering ghost of wind blowing through the bitter remnant of atmosphere, but he couldn't hear it through the heavy plastiglass and somehow he felt that fact as a deeper isolation.

It was a cruel world, this Mars, a

world of cold and ruin and soaring scornful emptiness, a world that broke men's hearts and drained their lives from them—rainless, oceanless, heatless, kindless, where the great wheel of the stars swung through a desert of millennia, where the days cried with wind and the nights rang and groaned with the riving frost. It was a world of waste and mystery, a niggard world where a man ate starvation and drank thirst and finally went down in darkness. Men trudged through unending miles, toil and loneliness and quiet creeping fear, sweated and gasped, cursed the planet and wept for the dead and snatched at warmth and life in the drab colony towns. *It's all right when you find yourself talking to the sandbugs—but when they start talking back, it's time to go home.*

And yet— And yet— The huge gray sweep of the polar moors, thin faint skirl of wind, sunlight shattered to a million diamond shards on the hoarfrost cap; the cloven tremendousness of Rasmussen Gorge, a tumbling sculptured wilderness of fairy stone, uncounted shifting hues of incredible color and fleeting shadow; the high cold night of stars, fantastically brilliant constellations marching over a crystal heaven, a silence so great you thought you could hear God speaking far out over the universe; the delicate dayflowers of the Syrtis forests, loveliness blooming with the bitter dawn and dying in the swift sunset; traveling and searching, rare triumph and shaking defeat, but always the quest and the comradeship. Oh, yes, Mars was savage to her lovers, but she gave them of her strange beauty and they would not forget her while they lived.

Maybe Stef was the lucky one, thought Rosenberg. He died here.

He guided the sandcat over a razor-back ridge. For a moment he paused, looking at the broad valley beyond. He hadn't been to Drygluch for a couple of years—that'd be almost four Earth-years, he remembered.

The town, half underground below its domed roof, hadn't changed much outwardly, but the plantations had doubled their area. The genetic engineers were doing good work, adapting terrestrial food

plants to Mars and Martian plants to the needs of humans. The colonies were already self-supporting with regard to essentials, as they had to be considering the expense of freight from Earth. But they still hadn't developed a decent meat animal, that part of the diet had to come from yeast-culture factories in the towns and nobody saw a beefsteak on Mars. *But we'll have that too, one of these years.*

A worn-out world, a stern and bitter and grudging world, but it was being tamed. Already the new generation was being born. There wasn't much fresh immigration from Earth these days, but man was unshakably rooted here. Some day he'd get around to modifying the atmosphere and weather till humans could walk free and unclothed over the rusty hills—but that wouldn't happen till he, Rosenberg, was dead, and in an obscure way he was glad of it.

The cat's supercharging pumps roared, supplementing tanked oxygen with Martian air for the hungry Diesel as the man steered it along the precarious trail. It was terribly thin, that air, but its oxygen was mostly ozone and that helped. Passing a thorium mine, Rosenberg scowled. The existence of fissionables was the main reason for planting colonies here in the first place, but they should be saved for Mars.

Well, I'm not really a Martian any longer. I'll be an Earthman again soon. You have to die on Mars, like Stef, and give your body back to the Martian land, before you altogether belong here.

The trail from the mine became broad and hard-packed enough to be called a road. There was other traffic now, streaming from all corners—a loaded ore-car, a farmer coming in with a truckful of harvested crops, a survey expedition returning with maps and specimens. Rosenberg waved to the drivers. They were of many nationalities, but except for the Pilgrims that didn't matter. Here they were simply humans. He hoped the U.N. would get around to internationalizing the planets soon.

There was a flag on a tall staff outside the town, the Stars and Stripes stiff against an alien sky. It was of metal—

it had to be, in that murderous corroding atmosphere—and Rosenberg imagined that they had to repaint it pretty often. He steered past it, down a long ramp leading under the dome. He had to wait his turn at the air lock, and wondered when somebody would invent a better system of oxygen conservation. New experiments in submolar mechanics were a promising lead.

He left his cat in the underground garage, with word to the attendant that another man, its purchaser, would pick it up later. There was an odd stinging in his eyes as he patted its scarred flanks. Then he took an elevator and a slideway to the housing office and arranged for a room—he had a couple of days before the *Phobos* left. A shower and a change of clothes were sheer luxury and he reveled in them. He didn't feel much desire for the co-operative taverns and pleasure joints, so he called up Doc Fieri instead.

The physician's round face beamed at him in the plate. "Barney, you old sand-bugger! When'd you get in?"

"Just now. Can I come up?"

"Yeah, sure. Nothing doing at the office . . . that is, I've got company, but he won't stay long. Come right on over."

Rosenberg took a remembered route through crowded hallways and elevators till he reached the door he wanted. He knocked—Drygulch's imports and its own manufactories needed other things more urgently than call and recorder circuits. "Come in!" bawled the voice.

Rosenberg entered the cluttered room, a small leathery man with gray-sprinkled hair and a beaky nose, and Fieri pumped his hand enthusiastically. The guest stood rigid in the background, a lean ascetic figure in black—a Pilgrim. Rosenberg stiffened inwardly. He didn't like that sort, puritan fanatics from the Years of Madness who'd gone to Mars so they could be unhappy in freedom. Rosenberg didn't care what a man's religion was, but nobody on Mars had a right to be so clannish and to deny co-operation as much as New Jerusalem. However, he shook hands politely, relishing the Pilgrim's ill-concealed distaste—they were anti-Semitic, too.

"This is Dr. Morton," explained Fieri.

"He heard of my research and came around to inquire about it."

"Most interesting," said the stranger. "And most promising, too. It will mean a great deal to Martian colonization."

"And surgery and biological research everywhere," put in Fieri. Pride was bursting from him.

"What is it, Doc?" asked Rosenberg, as expected.

"Suspended animation," said Fieri.

"Hm-m-m?"

"Uh-huh. You see, in what little spare time I have, I've pattered around with Martian biochemistry. Fascinating subject, and unearthly in two meanings of the word. We've nothing like it at home—don't need it. Hibernation and estivation approximate it, of course."

"Um-m-m—yes." Rosenberg rubbed his chin. "I know what you mean. Everybody does. The way so many plants and animals needing heat for their metabolisms can curl up and 'sleep' through the nights, or even through the whole winter. Or they can survive prolonged droughts that way, too." He chuckled. "Comparative matter, of course. Mars is in a state of permanent drought, by Earthly standards."

"And you say, Dr. Fieri, that the natives can do it also?" asked Morton.

"Yes. Even they, with a quite highly developed nervous system, can apparently 'sleep' through such spells of cold or famine. I had to rely on explorer's fragmentary reports for that datum—there are so few natives left, and they're so shy and secretive. But last year I did finally get a look at one in such a condition. It was incredible—respiration was undetectable, the heartbeat almost so, the encephalograph showed only a very slow, steady pulse. But I got blood and tissue samples, and was able to analyze and compare them with secretions from other life forms in suspension."

"I thought even Martians' blood would freeze in a winter night," said Rosenberg.

"It does. The freezing point is much lower than with human blood, but not so low that it can't freeze at all. However, in suspension there's a whole series of enzymes released. One of them, dissolved in the bloodstream, changes the characteristics of the plasma. When ice

crystals form, they're *more* dense than the liquid, therefore cell walls aren't ruptured and the organism survives. Moreover, a slow circulation of oxygen-bearing radicals and nutrient solutions takes place even through the ice, apparently by some process analogous to ion exchange. Not much, but enough to keep the organism alive and undamaged. Heat, a sufficient temperature, causes the breakdown of these secretions and the animal or plant revives. In the case of suspension to escape thirst or famine, the process is somewhat different, of course, though the same basic enzymes are involved."

Fieri laughed triumphantly and slapped a heap of papers on his desk. "Here are my notes. The work isn't complete yet, I'm not quite ready to publish, but it's more or less a matter of detail now." A Nobel Prize glittered in his eye.

Morton skimmed through the manuscript. "Very interesting," he murmured. His lean, close-cropped head bent over a structural formula. "The physical chemistry of this material must be weird."

"It is, Morton, it is." Fieri grinned.

"Hm-m-m—do you mind if I borrow this to read? As I mentioned earlier, I believe my lab at New Jerusalem could carry out some of these analyses for you."

"That'll be fine. Tell you what, I'll make up a stat of this whole mess for you. I'll have it ready by tomorrow."

"Thank you." Morton smiled, though it seemed to hurt his face. "This will be quite a surprise, I'll warrant. You haven't told anyone else?"

"Oh, I've mentioned it around, of course, but you're the first person who's asked for the technical details. Everybody's too busy with their own work on Mars. But it'll knock their eye out back on Earth. They've been looking for something like this ever since . . . since the Sleeping Beauty story . . . and here's the first way to achieve it."

"I'd like to read this too, Doc," said Rosenberg.

"Are you a biochemist?" asked Morton.

"Well, I know enough biology and chemistry to get by, and I'll have leisure to wade through this before my ship blasts."

"Sure, Barney," said Fieri. "And do me a favor, will you? When you get home, tell old Summers at Cambridge . . . England, that is . . . about it. He's their big biochemist, and he always said I was one of his brighter pupils and shouldn't have switched over to medicine. I'm a modest cuss, huh? But yet, it's not everybody who grabs onto something as big as this!"

Morton's pale eyes lifted to Rosenberg's. "So you are returning to Earth?" he asked.

"Yeah. The *Phobos*." He felt he had to explain, that he didn't want the Pilgrim to think he was running out. "More or less doctor's orders, you understand. My helmet cracked open in a fall last year, and before I could slap a patch on I had a beautiful case of the bends, plus the low pressure and the cold and the ozone raising the very devil with my lungs." Rosenberg shrugged, and his smile was bitter. "I suppose I'm fortunate to be alive. At least I have enough credit saved to retire. But I'm just not strong enough to continue working on Mars, and it's not the sort of place where you can loaf and remain sane."

"I see. It is a shame. When will you be on Earth, then?"

"Couple of months. The *Phobos* goes orbital most of the way. Do I look like I could afford an acceleration passage?" Rosenberg turned to Fieri. "Doc, will there be any other old sanders coming home this trip?"

"Fraid not. You know there are darn few who retire from Mars to Earth—they die first. You're one of the lucky ones."

"A lonesome trip, then. Well, I suppose I'll survive it."

Morton made his excuses and left. Fieri stared after him. "Odd fellow. But then, all these Pilgrims are. They're anti-almost everything. He's competent, though, and I'm glad he can tackle some of those analyses for me." He slapped Rosenberg's shoulder. "But forget it, old man! Cheer up and come along with me for a beer. Once you're stretched out on those warm white Florida sands, with blue sky and blue sea and luscious blondes walking by, I guarantee you won't miss Mars."

"Maybe not." Rosenberg looked unhappily at the floor. "It's never been the same since Stef died. I didn't realize how much he'd meant to me till I'd buried him and gone on by myself."

"He meant a lot to everyone, Barney. He was one of those people who seem to fill the world with life, wherever they are. Let's see—he was about sixty when he died, wasn't he? I saw him shortly before, and he could still drink any two men under the table, and all the girls were still adoring him."

"Yeah. He was my best friend, I suppose. We tramped Earth and the planets together for fifteen years." Rosenberg smiled. "Funny thing, friendship. It has nothing to do with the love of women—which is why they never understand it. Stef and I didn't even talk much. It wasn't needed. The last five years have been pretty empty without him."

"He died in a cave-in, didn't he?"

"Yes. We were exploring up near the Sawtooths, hunting a uranium lode. Our diggings collapsed; he held that toppling roof up with his shoulders and yelled at me to scramble out—then before he could get clear, it came down and burst his helmet open. I buried him on a hill, under a cairn, looking out over the desert. He was always a friend of high places."

"Yes . . . well, thinking about Stefan Rostomily won't help him or us now. Let's go get that beer, shall we?"

CHAPTER IV.

THE shrilling within his head brought Norbert Naysmith to full awareness with a savage force. His arm jerked, and the brush streaked a yellow line across his canvas.

"Naysmith!" The voice rattled harshly in his skull. "Report to Prior at Frisco Unit. Urgent. Martin Donner has disappeared, presumed dead. You're on his job now. Hop to it, boy."

For a moment Naysmith didn't grasp the name. He'd never met anyone called Donner. Then—yes, that was on the list, Donner was one of the Brotherhood. And dead now.

Dead—He had never seen Martin Donner, and yet he knew the man with

an intimacy no two humans had realized before the Brothers came. Sharp in his mind rose the picture of the dead man, smiling a characteristic slow smile, sprawled back in a relaxer with a glass of Scotch in one strong blunt-fingered hand. The Brothers were all partial to Scotch, thought Naysmith with a twisting sadness. And Donner had been a mech-volley fan, and had played good chess, read a lot and sometimes quoted Shakespeare, tinkered with machinery, probably had a small collection of guns—

Dead. Sprawled sightlessly somewhere on the turning planet, his muscles stiff, his body already devouring itself in proteolysis, his brain darkened—withdrawn into the great night, and leaving an irreparable gap in the thin tight-drawn line of the Brotherhood.

"You might pick up a newscast on your way," said the voice in his head conversationally. "It's hot stuff."

Naysmith's eyes focused on his painting. It was shaping up to be a good one. He had been experimenting with techniques, and this latest caught the wide sunlit dazzle of California beach, the long creaming swell of waves, the hot cloudless sky and the thin grass and the tawny-skinned woman who sprawled on the sand. Why did they have to call him just now?

"O.K., Sofie," he said with resignation. "That's all. I've got to get back."

The sun-browned woman rolled over on one elbow and looked at him. "What the devil?" she asked. "We've only been here three hours. The day's hardly begun."

"It's gone far enough, I'm afraid." Naysmith began putting away his brushes. "Home to civilization."

"But I don't want to!"

"What has that got to do with it?" snorted the man. *Treat 'em rough and tell 'em nothing, and they'll come running. These modern women aren't as emancipated as they think.* He folded his easel.

"But why?" she cried, half getting up. "I have an appointment this afternoon." Naysmith strode down the beach toward the trail. After a moment, Sofie followed.

"You didn't tell me that," she protested.

"You didn't ask me," he said. He added a "Sorry" that was no apology at all.

There weren't many others on the beach, and the parking lot was relatively uncluttered. Naysmith palmed the door of his boat and it opened for him. He put a beret rakishly atop his sun-bleached yellow hair, and entered the boat. Sofie followed.

The ovoid shell slipped skyward on murmuring jets. "I'll drop you off at your place," said Naysmith. "Some other time, huh?"

She remained sulkily silent. They had met accidentally a week before, in a bar. Naysmith was officially a cybernetic epistemologist on vacation, Sofie an engineer on the Pacific Colony project, off for a holiday from her job. It had been a pleasant interlude, and Naysmith regretted it mildly.

Still—the rising urgent pulse of excitement tensed his body and cleared the last mists of artistic preoccupation from his brain. You lived on a knife edge in the Service, you drew breath and looked at the sun and gasped after the real world with a desperate awareness of little time. None of the Brotherhood were members of the Hedonists, they were all too well-balanced for that, but inevitably they were all epicureans.

When you were trained from . . . well, from birth, even the sharpness of nearing death could be a kind of pleasure. Besides, thought Naysmith, *I might be one of the survivors.*

"You are a rat, you know," said Sofie.

"Squeak," said Naysmith. His face—the strange strong face of level fair brows and wide-set blue eyes, broad across the high cheekbones and in the mouth, square-jawed and crag-nosed—split in a grin that laughed with her while it laughed at her. He looked older than his twenty-five years. And she, thought Sofie with sudden tiredness, looked younger than her forty. Her people had been well off even during the Years of Hunger, she'd always been exposed to the best available biomedical techniques, and if

she claimed thirty few would call her a liar. But—

Naysmith fiddled with the radio. Presently a voice came out of it, he didn't bother to focus the TV.

"... The thorough investigation demanded by finance minister Arnold Besser has been promised by President Lopez. In a prepared statement, the president said: 'The rest of the ministry, like myself, are frankly inclined to discredit this accusation and believe that the Chinese government is mistaken. However, its serious nature—'

"Lopez, eh? The U.N. president himself," murmured Naysmith. "That means the accusation has been made officially now."

"What accusation?" asked the woman. "I haven't heard a 'cast for a week."

"The Chinese government was going to lodge charges that the assassination of Kwang-ti was done by U.N. secret agents," said Naysmith.

"Why, that's ridiculous!" she gasped. "The U.N.?" She shook her dark head. "They haven't the—right. The U.N. agents, I mean. Kwang-ti was a menace, yes, but assassination! I don't believe it."

"Just think what the anti-U.N. factions all over the Solar System, including our own Americanists, are going to make of this," said Naysmith. "Right on top of charges of corruption comes one of murder!"

"Turn it off," she said. "It's too horrible."

"These are horrible times, Sofie."

"I thought they were getting better." She shuddered. "I remember the tail-end of the Years of Hunger, and then the Years of Madness, and the Socialist Depression—people in rags, starving, you could see their bones—and a riot once, and the marching uniforms, and the great craters—No! The U.N.'s like a dam against all that hell—it *can't* break!"

Naysmith put the boat on automatic and comforted her. After all, anyone loyal to the U.N. deserved a little consideration.

Especially in view of the suppressed fact that the Chinese charge was absolutely true.

He dropped the woman off at her house, a small prefab in one of the

colonies, and made vague promises about looking her up again. Then he opened the jets fully and streaked north toward Frisco Unit.

CHAPTER V.

THERE was a lot of traffic around the great building, and his autopilot was kept busy bringing him in. Naysmith slipped a mantle over his tunic and a conventional half-mask over his face, the latter less from politeness than as a disguise. He didn't think he was being watched, but you were never sure. American Security was quite efficient.

If ever wheels turned within wheels, he thought sardonically, modern American politics did the spinning. The government was officially Labor and pro-U.N., and was gradually being taken over by its sociodynamicists, who were even more in favor of world federation. However, the conservatives of all stripes, from the mildly socialist Republicans to the extreme Americanists, had enough seats in Congress and enough power generally to exert a potent influence. Among other things, the conservative coalition had prevented the abrogation of the Department of Security, and Hessling, its chief, was known to have Americanist leanings. So there were at least a goodly number of S-men out after "foreign agents"—which included Un-men.

Fourre had his own agents in American Security, of course. It was largely due to their efforts that the American Brothers had false IDs and that the whole tremendous fact of the Brotherhood had remained secret. But some day, thought Naysmith, the story would come out—and then the heavens would fall.

So thin a knife edge, so deep an abyss of chaos and ruin—society was mad, humanity was a race of insane, and the few who strove to build stability were working against shattering odds. *Sofie was right. The U.N. is a dike, holding back a sea of radioactive blood from the lands of men. And I, thought Naysmith wryly, seem to be the little boy with his finger in the dike.*

His boat landed on the downward ramp and rolled into the echoing vastness

of the unit garage. He didn't quite dare land on Prior's flange. A mechanic tagged the vehicle, gave Naysmith a receipt, and guided him toward an elevator. It was an express, bearing him swiftly past the lower levels of shops, offices, service establishments, and places of education and entertainment, up to the residential stories. Naysmith stood in a crowd of humans, most of them masked, and waited for his stop. No one spoke to anyone else, the custom of privacy had become too ingrained. He was just as glad of that.

On Prior's level, the hundred and seventh, he stepped onto the slideway going east, transferred to a north-bound strip at the second corner, and rode half a mile before he came to the alcove he wanted. He got off, the rubbery floor absorbing the very slight shock, and entered the recess. When he pressed the door button, the recorded voice said: "I am sorry, Mr. Prior is not at home. Do you wish to record a message?"

"Shut up and let me in," said Naysmith.

The code sentence activated the door, which opened for him. He stepped into a simply furnished vestibule as the door chimed. Prior's voice came over the intercom: "Naysmith?"

"The same."

"Come on in, then. Living room."

Naysmith hung up his mask and mantle, slipped off his sandals, and went down the hall. The floor was warm and resilient under his bare feet, like living flesh. Beyond another door that swung aside was the living room, also furnished with a bachelor austerity. Prior was a lone wolf by nature, belonging to no clubs. His official job was semantic analyst for a large trading outfit; it gave him a lot of free time for his U.N. activities, plus a good excuse for traveling anywhere in the Solar System.

Naysmith's eyes flickered over the dark face of his co-worker—Prior was not a Brother, though he knew of the band—and rested on the man who lay in the adjoining relaxer. "Are you here, chief?" He whistled. "Then it must be really big."

"Take off your clothes and get some sun lamp," invited Prior, waving his eternal cigarette at a relaxer. "I'll try to scare up some Scotch for you."

"Why does the Brotherhood always have to drink Scotch?" grumbled Etienne Fourre. "Your padded expense accounts eat up half my budget. Or drink it up, I should say."

He was squat and square and powerful, and at eighty was still more alive than most boys. Small black eyes glistened in a face that seemed carved from scarred and pitted rock; his voice was a bass rumble from the deep shaggy chest, its English hardly accented at all. Geriatrics could only account for some of the vitality that lay like a coiled quivering spring in him, for the entire battery of diet, exercise, and chemistry has to be applied almost from birth to give maximum effect and his youth antedated the science. *But he'll probably outlive us all*, thought Naysmith.

There was something of the fanatic about Etienne Fourre. He was a child of war whose most relentless battle had become one against war itself. As a young man he had been in the French Resistance of World War II. Later he had been high in the Western liaison with the European undergrounds of World War III, entering the occupied and devastated lands himself on his dark missions. He had fought with the Liberals against the neofascists in the Years of Hunger and with the gendarmerie against the Atomists in the Years of Madness and with U.N. troops in the Near East where his spy system had been a major factor in suppressing the Great Jihad. He had accepted the head of the secret service division of the U.N. Inspectorate after the Conference of Rio revised the charter and had proceeded quietly to engineer the coup which overthrew the anti-U.N. government of Argentina. Later his men had put the finger on Kwang-ti's faked revolution in the Republic of Mongolia, thus ending that conquest-from-within scheme; and he was ultimately the one responsible for the Chinese dictator's assassination. The Brotherhood was his idea from the beginning, his child and his instrument.

Such a man, thought Naysmith, would in earlier days have stood behind the stake and lash of an Inquisition, would have marched at Cromwell's side and carried out the Irish massacres, would

have helped set up world-wide Communism—a sternly religious man, for all his mordant atheism, a living sword which needed a war. *Thank God he's on our side!*

"All right, what's the story?" asked the Un-man aloud.

"How long since you were on a Service job?" countered Fourre.

"About a year. Schumacher and I were investigating the *Arbeitspartei* in Germany—all the other German Brothers were tied up in that Austrian business, you remember, and I speak the language well enough to pass for a Rhinelander when I'm in Prussia."

"Yes, I recall. You have been loafing long enough, my friend." Fourre took the glass of wine offered him by Prior, sipped it, and grimaced. "*Merdel!* Won't these Californians ever give up trying?" Swinging back to Naysmith: "I am calling in the whole Brotherhood on this. I shall have to get back to Rio fast, the devil is running loose down there with those Chinese charges and I will be lucky to save our collective necks. But I have slipped up to North America to get you people organized and under way. While I am pretty sure that the leadership of our great and unknown enemy is down in Rio—probably with Besser, who is at least involved in it but has taken some very excellent precautions against assassination—and it would do no good to kill him only to have someone else take over. At any rate, the United States is still a most important focus of anti-U.N. activity, and Donner's capture means a rapid deterioration of things here. Prior, who was Donner's contact man, tells me that he was apparently closer to spying out the enemy headquarters for this continent than any other operative. Now that Donner is gone, Prior has recommended you to succeed in his assignment."

"Which was what?"

"I will come to that. Donner was an engineer by training. You are a cybernetic analyst, *hein?*"

"Yes, officially," said Naysmith. "My degrees are in epistemology and communications theory, and my supposed job is basic-theoretical consultant. Troubleshooter in the realm of ideas." He

grinned. "When I get stuck, I can always refer the problem to Prior here."

"Ah, so. You are then necessarily something of a linguist too, eh? Good. Understand, I am not choosing you for your specialty, but rather for your unspecialty. You are too old to have had the benefit of Synthesis training. Some of the younger Brothers are getting it, of course. There is a lad in Mexico, Peter Christian, whose call numbers you had better get from Prior in case you need such help.

"Meanwhile, an epistemologist or semanticist is the closest available thing to an integrating synthesist. By your knowledge of language, psychology, and the general sciences, you should be well equipped to fit together whatever information you can obtain and derive a larger picture from them. I don't know." Fourre lit a cigar and puffed ferociously.

"Well, I can start anytime—I'm on extended leave of absence from my nominal job already," said Naysmith. "But what about this Donner? How far had he gotten, what happened to him, and so on?"

"I'll give you the background, because you'll need it," said Prior. "Martin Donner was officially adopted in Canada and, as I said, received a mechanical engineering degree there. About four years ago we had reason to think the enemy was learning that he wasn't all he seemed, so we transferred him to the States, flanged up an American ID for him and so on. Recently he was put to work investigating the Americanists. His leads were simple; he got a job with Brain Tools, Inc., which is known to be lousy with Party members. He didn't try to infiltrate the Party—we already have men in it, of course, though they haven't gotten very high—but he did snoop around, gather data, and finally put the snatch on a certain man and pumped him full of truth drug." Naysmith didn't ask what had happened to the victim—the struggle was utterly ruthless, with all history at stake. "That gave him news about the Midwestern headquarters of the conspiracy, so he went there. It was one of the big units in Illinois. He got himself an apartment and—disappeared. That was almost two

weeks ago." Prior shrugged. "He's quite certainly dead by now. If they didn't kill him themselves, he'll have found a way to suicide."

"You can give me the dossier on what Donner learned and communicated to you?" asked Naysmith.

"Yes, of course, though I don't think it'll help you much." Prior looked moodily at his glass. "You'll be pretty much on your own. I needn't add that anything goes, from privacy violation to murder, but that with the Service in such bad odor right now you'd better not leave any evidence. Your first job, though, is to approach Donner's family. You see, he was married."

"Oh?"

"I don't mean free-married or group-married, or trial-married, or any other version," snapped Prior impatiently. "I mean *married*. Old style. One kid."

"Hm-m-m—that's not so good, is it?"

"No. Un-men really have no business marrying, and most especially the Brothers don't. However— You see the difficulties, don't you? If Donner is still alive, somehow, and the gang traces his ID and grabs the wife and kid, they've got a hold on him that may make him spill all he knows. No sane man is infinitely loyal to a cause."

"Well, I suppose you provided Donner with a Midwestern ID."

"Sure. Or rather, he used the one we already had set up—name, fingerprints, number, all the data registered at Midwest Central. Praise Allah, we've got friends in the registry bureau! But Donner's case is bad. In previous instances where we lost a Brother, we've been able to recover the corpse or were at least sure that it was safely destroyed. Now the enemy has one complete Brother body, ready for fingerprinting, retinals, blood typing, Bertillon measurements, autopsy, and everything else they can think of. We can expect them to check that set of physical data against every ID office in the country. And when they find the same identification under different names and numbers in each and every file—things will pop."

"It will take time, of course," said Fourre. "We have put in duplicate sets

of non-Brother data too, as you know; that will give them extra work to do. Nor can they be sure which set corresponds to Donner's real identity."

In spite of himself, Naysmith grinned again. "Real identity" was an incongruous term as applied to the Brotherhood. However—

"Nevertheless," went on Fourre, "there is going to be an investigation in every country on Earth and perhaps the Moon and planets. The Brotherhood is going to have to go underground, in this country at least. And just now when I have to be fighting for my service's continued existence down in Rio!"

They're closing in. We stand at bay, and the triumphant powers tighten their ring. We always knew, deep in our brains, that this day of ruin would come, and now it is upon us.

"Even assuming Donner is dead, which is more likely," said Prior, "his widow would make a valuable captive for the gang. Probably she knows very little about her husband's Service activities, but she undoubtedly has a vast amount of information buried in her subconscious—faces, snatches of overheard conversation, perhaps merely the exact dates Donner was absent on this or that mission. A skilled man could get it out of her, you know—thereby presenting the enemy detectives with any number of leads—some of which would go straight to our most cherished secrets."

"Haven't you tried to spirit her away?" asked Naysmith.

"She won't spirit," said Prior. "We sent an accredited agent to warn her she was in danger and advise her to come away with him. She refused flat. After all, how can one be sure our agent isn't the creature of the enemy? Furthermore, she took some very intelligent precautions, such as consulting the local police, leaving notes in her bankbox to be opened if she disappears without warning, and so on, which have in effect made it impossibly difficult for us to remove her against her will. If nothing else, we couldn't stand the publicity. All we've been able to do is put a couple of men to watching her—and one of these was picked up by



the cops the other day and we had quite a time springing him."

"She's got backbone," said Naysmith.

"Too much," replied Prior. "Well, you know your first assignment. Get her to go off willingly with you, hide her and the kid away somewhere, and then go underground yourself. After that, it's more or less up to you, boy."

"But how'll I persuade her to—"

"Isn't it obvious?" snapped Fourre.

It was. Naysmith grimaced. "Isn't it enough that I do your murders and robberies for you?"

CHAPTER VI.

BRIGHAM CITY UTAH, was not officially a colony, having existed long before the postwar resettlements. But it had always been a lovely town, and had converted itself almost entirely to modern layout and architecture. Naysmith had not been there before, but he felt his heart warming to it—the same as *Donner, who is dead now.*

He opened all jets and screamed at his habitual speed low above the crumbling highway. Hills and orchards lay green about him under a high clear heaven, a

great oasis lifted from the wastelands by the hands of men. They had come across many-miled emptiness, those men of another day, trudging dustily by their creaking, bumping, battered wagons on the way to the Promised Land; and he, today, sat on plastic-foam cushions in a metal shell, howling at a thousand miles an hour till the echoes thundered, but was himself fleeing the persecutors.

Local traffic control took over as he intersected the radio beam. He relaxed as much as possible, puffing a nervous cigarette while the autopilot brought him in. When the boat grounded in a side lane, he slipped a full mask over his head and resumed manually, driving.

The houses nestled in their screens of lawn and trees, the low half-underground homes of small families. Men and women, some in laboring clothes, were about on the slideways, and there were more children in sight, small bright flashes of color laughing and shouting, than was common elsewhere. The Mormon influence, Naysmith supposed. Most of the fruit-raising plantations were still privately owned small-holdings too, using co-operation to compete with the giant government-regulated agricultural combines. But

there would nevertheless be a high proportion of men and women here who communicated to outside jobs by airbus—workers on the Pacific Colony project, for instance.

He reviewed Prior's file on Donner, passing the scanty items through his memory. The Brothers were always on call, but outside their own circle they were as jealous of their privacy as anyone else. It had, however, been plain that Jeanne Donner worked at home as a mail-consultant semantic linguist—correcting manuscript of various kinds—and gave an unusual amount of personal attention to her husband and child.

Naysmith felt inwardly cold.

Here was the address. He brought the boat to a silent halt and started up the walk toward the house. Its severe modern lines and curves were softened by a great rush of morning glory, and it lay in the rustling shade of trees, and there was a broad garden behind it. That was undoubtedly Jeanne's work—Donner would have hated gardening.

Instinctively, Naysmith glanced about for Prior's watchman. Nowhere in sight—but then, a good operative wouldn't be. Perhaps that old man, white-bearded and patriarchal, on the slideway; or the delivery boy whipping down the street on his biwheel; or even the little girl skipping rope in the park across the way. She might not be what she seemed. The biological laboratories could do strange things, and Fourre had built up his own secret shops.

The door was in front of him, shaded by a small vine-draped portico. He thumbed the button, and the voice informed him that no one was at home. Which was doubtless a lie, but—*Poor kid! Poor girl, huddled in there against fear, against the nameless night which swallowed her man—waiting for his return, for a dead man's return.* Naysmith shook his head, swallowing a gorge of bitterness, and spoke into the recorder: "Hello, honey. Aren't you being sort of inhospitable?"

She must have activated the playback at once, because it was only a minute before the door swung open. Naysmith caught her in his arms as he stepped into the vestibule.

"Marty, Marty, Marty!" she was sobbing and laughing, straining against him, pulling his face down to hers. The long black hair blinded his stinging eyes. "Oh, Marty, take off that mask, it's been so long—"

She was of medium height, lithe and slim in his grasp, the face strong under its elfish lines, the eyes dark and lustrous and very faintly slanted, and the feel and the shaking voice of her made him realize his own loneliness with a sudden desolation. He lifted the mask, letting its helmet-shaped hollowness thud on the floor, and kissed her. He thought savagely: *Donner would have to pick the kind I fall for! But then, he'd be bound to do so, wouldn't he?*

"Sweetheart," he said urgently, while she ruffled his hair, "get some clothes and a mask—Bobby too, of course. Never mind packing anything. Just call up the police and tell 'em you're leaving of your own accord. We've got to get out of here fast."

She stepped back a pace and looked at him with puzzlement. "What's happened, Marty?" she whispered.

"Fast, I said!" He brushed past her into the living room. "I'll explain later."

She nodded and was gone into one of the bedrooms, bending over a crib and picking up a small sleepy figure. Naysmith lit another cigarette while his eyes prowled the room.

It was a typical 'prefab house, but Martin Donner, this other self who was now locked in darkness, had left his personality here. None of the mass-produced featureless gimmickry of today's floaters—this was the home of people who had meant to stay. Naysmith thought of the succession of apartments and hotel rooms which had been his life, and the loneliness deepened in him.

Yes—just as it should be. Donner had probably built that stone fireplace himself, not because it was needed but because the quiet flicker of burning logs was good to look on. There was an antique musket hanging above the mantle, which bore a few objects—old marble clock, wrought-brass candlesticks, a flashing bit of Lunar crystal. The desk was a mahogany anachronism among relaxers. There were some

animated films on the walls, but there were a couple of reproductions too—a Rembrandt rabbi and a Constable landscape—and a few engravings. There was an expensive console with a wide selection of music wires. The bookshelves held their share of microprint rolls, but there were a lot of old-style volumes too, carefully rebound. Naysmith smiled as his eye fell on the set of Shakespeare.

The Donners had not been live-in-the-past cranks, but they had not been rootless either. Naysmith sighed and recalled his anthropology. Western society had been based on the family as an economic and social unit; the first *raison d'être* had gone out with technology, the second had followed in the last war and the postwar upheavals. Modern life was an impersonal thing, marriage—permanent marriage—came late, when both parties were tired of chasing, and was a loose contract at best—the crèche, the school, the public entertainment, made children a shadowy part of the home. And all of this reacted on the human self. From a creature of strong, highly focused emotional life, with a personality made complex by the interaction of environment and ego, Western man was changing to something like the old Samoan aborigines, easy-going, well-adjusted, close friendship and romantic love sliding into limbo. You couldn't say that it was good or bad, one way or the other; but you wondered what it would do to society.

But what could be done about it? You couldn't go back again, you couldn't support today's population with medieval technology even if the population had been willing to try. But that meant accepting the philosophical basis of science, exchanging the cozy medieval cosmos for a bewildering grid of impersonal relationships and abandoning the old cry of man shaking his fist at an empty heaven: *Why?* If you wanted to control population and disease—and the first, at least, was still a hideously urgent need—you accepted chemical contraceptives and antibiotic tablets and educated people to carry them in their pockets. Modern technology had no use for the pick-and-shovel laborer or for the routine intellectual; so you were faced with a huge class

of people not fit for anything else, and what were you going to do about it? What your great, unbelievably complex civilization-machine needed, what it *had* to have in appalling quantity, was the trained man, trained to the limit of his capacity; but then education had to start early and, being free as long as you could pass exams, be ruthlessly selective. Which meant that your First classes, Ph.D.'s at twenty or younger, looked down on the Second schools, who took out their frustration on the Thirds—intellectual snobishness, social friction, but how to escape it?

And it was, after all, a world of fantastic anachronisms, it had grown too fast and too unevenly. Hindu peasants scratched in their tiny fields and lived in mud huts while each big Chinese collective was getting its own power plant. Murderers lurked in the slums around Manhattan Crater while a technician could buy a house and furniture for six month's pay. Floating colonies were being established in the oceans, cities rose on Mars and Venus and the Moon, while Congo natives drummed at the rain clouds. Reconciliation—*how?*

Most people looked at the surface of things. They saw that the great upheavals, the World Wars and the Years of Hunger and the Years of Madness and the economic break-downs, had been accompanied by the dissolution of traditional social nodes, and they thought that the first was the cause of the second. "Give us a chance and we'll bring back the good old days." They couldn't see that those good old days had carried the seeds of death within them, that the change in technology had brought a change in human nature itself which would have deeper effects than any ephemeral transition period. War, depression, the waves of manic perversity, the hungry men and the marching men and the doomed men, were not causes, they were effects—symptoms. The world was changing and you can't go home again.

The psychodynamicists thought they were beginning to understand the process, with their semantic epistemology, games theory, least effort principle, communications theory—maybe so. It was too early

to tell. The Scientific Synthesis was still more of a dream than an achievement, and there would have to be at least one generation of Synthesis-trained citizens before the effects could be noticed. Meanwhile, the combination geriatrics and birth control, necessary as both were, was stiffening the population with the inevitable intellectual rigidity of advancing years, just at the moment when original thought was more desperately needed than ever before in history. The powers of chaos were gathering, and those who saw the truth and fought for it were so terribly few—*And are you absolutely sure you're right? Can you really justify your battle?*

"Daddy!"

Naysmith turned and held out his arms to the boy. A two-year-old, a sturdy lad with light hair and his mother's dark eyes, still half misted with sleep, was calling him. "Hullo, Bobby." His voice shook a little.

Jeanne picked the child up. She was masked and voluminously cloaked, and her tones were steadier than his. "All right, shall we go?"

Naysmith nodded and went to the front door. He was not quite there when the bell chimed.

"Who's that?" His ragged bark and the leap in his breast told him how strained his nerves were.

"I don't know . . . I've been staying indoors since—" Jeanne strode swiftly to one of the bay windows and lifted a curtain, peering out. "Two men. Strangers."

Naysmith fitted the mask on his own head and thumbed the playback switch. The voice was hard and sharp: "This is the Federal police. We know you are in, Mrs. Donner. Open at once."

"S-men!" Her whisper shuddered.

Naysmith nodded grimly. "They've tracked you down so soon, eh? Run and see if there are any behind the house."

Her feet pattered across the floor. "Four in the garden," she called.

"All right." Naysmith caught himself just before asking if she could shoot. He pulled the small flat stet-pistol from his tunic and gave it to her as she returned. He'd have to assume her training—the

needle was recoilless anyway. "'Once more unto the breach, dear friends—' We're getting out of here, Keep close behind me and shoot at their faces or hands—they may have breastplates under their clothes."

His own magnum automatic was cold and heavy in his hand. It was no gentle sleepy-gas weapon—at short range it would blow a hole in a man big enough to put your arm through, and a splinter from its bursting slug killed by hydrostatic shock. The rapping on the door grew thunderous.

She was all at once as cool as he. "Trouble with the law?" she asked.

"The wrong kind of law," he answered. "We've still got cops on our side, though, if that's any consolation."

They couldn't be agents of Fourre's or they would have given him the code sentence. That meant they were sent by the same power which had murdered Martin Donner. He felt no special compunctions about replying in kind. The trick was to escape.

Naysmith stepped back into the living room and picked up a light table, holding it before his body as a shield against needles. Returning to the hall, he crowded himself in front of Jeanne and pressed the door switch.

As the barrier swung open, Naysmith fired, a muted hiss and a dull thum of lead in flesh. That terrible impact sent the S-men off the porch and tumbling to the lawn in blood. His companion shot as if by instinct, needle thunking into the table. Naysmith gunned him down even as he cried out.

Now—outside—to the boat and fast! Sprinting across the grass, Naysmith felt the wicked hum of a missile fan his cheek. Jeanne whirled, encumbered by Bobby, and sprayed the approaching troop with needles as they burst around the corner of the house.

Naysmith was already at the opening door of his jet. He fired once again while his free hand started the motor.

The S-men were using needles. They wanted the quarry alive. Jeanne stumbled, a dart in her arm, letting Bobby slide to earth. Naysmith sprang back from the boat. A needle splintered on his mask

and he caught a whiff that made his head swoop.

The detectives spread out, approaching from two sides as they ran. Naysmith was shielded on one side by the boat, on the other by Jeanne's unstirring form as he picked her up. He crammed her and the child into the seat and wriggled across them. Slamming the door, he grabbed for the controls.

The whole performance had taken less than a minute. As the jet stood on its tail and screamed illegally skyward, Naysmith realized for the thousandth time that no ordinary human would have been fast enough and sure enough to carry off that escape. The S-men were good, but they had simply been outclassed.

They'd check the house, inch by inch, and find his recent fingerprints, and those would be the same as the stray ones left here and there throughout the world by certain Un-men operatives—the same as Donner's. It was *the* Un-man, the hated and feared shadow who could strike in a dozen places at once, swifter and deadlier than flesh had a right to be, and who had now risen from his grave to harry them again. He, Naysmith, had just added another chapter to an already lengthy legend.

Only—the S-men didn't believe in ghosts. They'd look for an answer. And if they found the right answer, that was the end of every dream.

And meanwhile the hunt was after him. Radio beams, license numbers, air-traffic analysis, broadcast alarms, ID files—all the resources of a great and desperate power would be hounding him across the world, and nowhere could he rest. And that power would absolutely have to find him; it had to fear an Unknown.

CHAPTER VII.

BOBBY was weeping in fright, and Naysmith comforted him as well as possible while ripping through the sky. It was hard to be gay, laugh with the boy and tickle him and convince him it was all an exciting game, while Jeanne slumped motionless in the seat and the earth blurred below. But terror at such an early age could have devastating psychic effects

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and had to be laid at once. *It's all I can do for you, son. The Brotherhood owes you that much, after the dirty trick it played in bringing you into this world as the child of one of us.*

When Bobby was at ease again, placed in the back seat to watch a televised robotshow, Naysmith surveyed his situation. The boat had more legs than the law permitted, which was one good aspect. He had taken it five miles up, well above the lanes of controlled traffic, and was running northward in a circuitous course. His hungry engines gulped oil at a frightening rate, he'd have to stop for a refill two or three times. Fortunately, he had plenty of cash along—the routine identification of a thumbprint check would leave a written invitation to the pursuers, whereas they might never stumble on the isolated fuel stations where he meant to buy.

Jeanne came awake, stirring and gasping. He held her close to him until the spasm of returning consciousness had passed and her eyes were clear again. Then he lit a cigarette for her and one for himself, and leaned back against the cushions.

"I suppose you're wondering what this is all about," he said.

"Uh-huh." Her smile was uncertain. "How much can you tell me?"

"As much as is safe for you to know," he answered. *How much does she already know? I can't give myself away yet! She must be aware that her husband is . . . was . . . an Un-man, that his nominal job was a camouflage, but the details?*

"Where are we going?" she asked.

"I've got a hiding place for you and

the kid, up in the Canadian Rockies. Not too comfortable, I'm afraid, but reasonably safe. If we can get there without being intercepted. It—"

"We interrupt this program to bring you an urgent announcement. A dangerous criminal is at large in an Airflyte numbered USA-1349-U-7683. Repeat, USA-1349-U-7683. This man is believed to be accompanied by a woman and child. If you see the boat, call the nearest police headquarters or Security office at once. The man is wanted for murder and kidnapping, and is thought to be the agent of a foreign power. Further announcements with complete description will follow as soon as possible."

The harsh voice faded and the robotshow came back on. "Man, oh man, oh man," breathed Naysmith. "They don't waste any time, do they?"

Jeanne's face was white, but her only words were: "How about painting this boat's number over?"

"Can't stop for that now or they'd catch us sure." Naysmith scanned the heavens. "Better strap yourself and Bobby in, though. If a police boat tracks us, I've got machine guns in this one. We'll blast them."

She fought back the tears with a heart-wrenching gallantry. "Mind explaining a little?"

"I'll have to begin at the beginning," he said cautiously. "To get it all in order, I'll have to tell you a lot of things you already know. But I want to give you the complete pattern. I want to break away from the dirty names like spy and traitor, and show you what we're really trying to do."

"We?" She caressed the pronoun. No sane human likes to stand utterly alone.

"Listen," said Naysmith, "I'm an Un-man. But a rather special kind. I'm not in the Inspectorate, allowed by charter and treaty to carry out investigations and report violations of things like disarmament agreements to the Council. I'm in the U.N. Secret Service—the *secret* Secret Service—and our standing is only quasi-legal. Officially we're an auxiliary to the Inspectorate; in practice we do a lot more. The Inspectorate is supposed to tell the U.N. Moon bases where to plant

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their rocket bombs; the Service tries to make bombardment unnecessary by forestalling hostile action."

"By assassinating Kwang-ti?" she challenged.

"Kwang-ti was a menace. He'd taken China out of the U.N. and was building up her armies. He'd made one attempt to take over Mongolia by sponsoring a phony revolt, and nearly succeeded. I'm not saying that he was knocked off by a Chinese Un-man, in spite of his successor government's charges; I'm just saying it was a good thing he died."

"He did a lot for China."

"Sure. And Hitler did a lot for Germany and Stalin did a lot for Russia, all of which was nullified, along with a lot of innocent people, when those countries went to war. Never forget that the U.N. exists first, last, and all the time to keep the peace. Everything else is secondary."

Jeanne lit another cigarette from the previous one. "Tell me more," she said in a voice that suggested she had known this for a long time.

"Look," said Naysmith, "the enemies the U.N. has faced in the past were as nothing to what endangers it now. Because before, the enmity has always been more or less open. In the Second War, the U.N. got started as a military alliance against the fascist powers. In the Third War it became, in effect, a military alliance against its own dissident and excommunicated members. After Rio it existed partly as an instrument of multi-lateral negotiation but still primarily as an alliance of a great many states, not merely Western, to prevent or suppress wars anywhere in the world. Oh, I don't want to play down its legal and cultural and humanitarian and scientific activities, but the essence of the U.N. was force, men and machines it could call on from all its member states—even against a member of itself, if that nation were found guilty by a majority vote in the Council. It wasn't quite as large of the United States as you think to turn its Lunar bases over to the U.N.—it thought it could still control the Council as it had done in the past, but it didn't work out that way. Which is all to the good—we need a truly international body.

"Anyway, the principle of intervention to stop all wars, invited or not, led to things like the Great Jihad and the Brazil-Argentine affair. Small-scale war fought to prevent large-scale war. Then when the Russian government appealed for help against its nationalist insurgents, and got it, the precedent of active intervention within a country's own boundaries was set—much to the good and much to the distaste of almost every government, including the American. The conservatives were in power here about that time, you remember, trying unsuccessfully to patch up the Socialist Depression, and they nearly walked us out of membership. Not quite, though—And those other international functions, research and trade regulation and so on, have been growing apace.

"You see where this is leading? I've told you many times before"—a safe guess that—"but I'll tell you again: The U.N. is in the process of becoming a federal world government. Already it has its own Inspectorate, its own small police force, and its Lunar Guard. Slowly, grudgingly, the nations are being induced to disarm—we abolished our own draft ten years or so back, remember? There's a movement afoot to internationalize the planets and the ocean developments, put them under direct U.N. authority. We've had international currency stabilization for a long time now—sooner or later, we'll adopt one money unit for the world. Tariffs are virtually extinct. Oh, I could go on all day.

"Previous proposals to make a world government of the U.N. were voted down. Nations were too short-sighted. But it is nevertheless happening, slowly, piece by piece, so that the final official unification of man will be only a formality. Understand? Of course you do. It's obvious. The trouble is, our enemies have begun to understand it too."

Naysmith lit a cigarette for himself and scowled at the blue cloud swirling from his nostrils. "There are so many who would like to break the U.N. There are nationalists and militarists of all kinds, all countries, men who would rise to power if the old anarchy returned—and the need for power is a physical hunger

in that sort. There are big men of industry, finance, and politics, who'd like to cut their enterprises loose from regulation. There are labor leaders who want a return of the old strife which means power and profit for them. There are religionists of a dozen sorts who don't like our population-control campaigns. There are cranks and fanatics who seek a chance to impose their own beliefs, everyone from Syndics to Neocommunists, Pilgrims to Hedonists. There are those who were hurt by some or other U.N. action—perhaps they lost a son in one of our campaigns, perhaps a new development or policy wiped out their business—they want revenge. Oh, there are a thousand kinds of them, and if once the U.N. collapses they'll all be free to go fishing in troubled waters."

"Tell me something new," said Jeanne impatiently.

"I have to lead up to it, darling. I have to explain what this latest threat is. You see, all these enemies of ours are getting together. All over the world, they're shelving their many quarrels and uniting into a great secret organization whose one purpose is to weaken and destroy the U.N. You wouldn't think fanatical nationalists of different countries could co-operate? Well, they can, because it's the only way they'll ever have a chance later on to attack each other. The leadership of this organization, which we Un-men somewhat inelegantly refer to as the gang, is brilliant; a lot of big men are members and the whole thing is beautifully set up. Such entities as the Americanist Party have become fronts for the gang. Whole governments are backing them, governments which are reluctant U.N. members only because of public opinion at home and the pressure that can be brought to bear on non-members. Kwang-ti's successors brought China back in, I'm sure, only to ruin us from within. U.N. Councilors are among their creatures, and I know not how many U.N. employees."

Naysmith smiled humorlessly. "Even now, the great bulk of people throughout the world are pro-U.N., looking on it as a deliverer from the hell they've survived. So one way the enemy has to destroy us

is by sabotage from inside. Corruption, arrogance, inefficiency, illegal actions—perpetrated by their own agents in the U.N. and becoming matters of public knowledge. You've heard a lot of that, and you'll hear still more in the months to come if this is allowed to go on. Another way is to ferret out some of our darker secrets—secrets which every government necessarily has—and make them known to the right people. All right, let's face it: Kwang-ti *was* assassinated by an Un-man. We thought the job had been passed off as the work of democratic conspirators, but apparently there's been a leak somewhere and the Chinese accusation is shaking the whole frail edifice of international co-operation. The Council will stall as long as possible, but eventually it'll have to disown the Service's action and heads will roll. Valuable heads.

"Now if at the proper moment, with the U.N. badly weakened, whole nations walking out again, public confidence trembling, there should be military revolutions within key nations—and the Moon bases seized by ground troops from a nearby colony—Do you see it? Do you see the return of international anarchy, dictatorship, war—and every Un-man in the Solar System hunted to his death?"

CHAPTER VIII.

By a roundabout course avoiding the major town and colonies, it was many hours even at the airboat's speed to Naysmith's goal. He found his powers of invention somewhat taxed enroute. First he had to give Jeanne a half true account of his whereabouts in the past weeks. Then Bobby, precociously articulate—as he should be with both parents well into the genius class—felt disturbed by the gravity of his elders and the imminent re-disappearance of a father whom he obviously worshipped, and could only be comforted by Naysmith's impromptu saga of Crock O'Dile, a green Irish alligator who worked at the Gideon Kleinmein Home for Helpless and Houseless Horses. Finally there were others to contend with, a couple of filling station operators and the clerk in a sporting goods store where he

purchased supplies—they had to be convinced in an unobtrusive way that these were dully everyday customers to be forgotten as soon as they were gone. It all seemed to go off easily enough, but Naysmith was cold with the tension of wondering whether any of these people had heard the broadcast alarms. Obviously not, so far—but when they got home and, inevitably, were informed, would they remember well enough?

He zigzagged over Washington, crossing into British Columbia above an empty stretch of forest. There was no official reason for an American to stop, but the border was a logical place for the S-men to watch.

"Will the Canadian police co-operate in hunting us?" asked Jeanne.

"I don't know," said Naysmith. "It all depends. You see, American Security, with its broad independent powers, has an anti-U.N. head, but on the other hand the President is pro-U.N. as everybody knows, and Fourre will doubtless see to it that he learns who this wanted criminal is. He can't actually countermand the chase without putting himself in an untenable position, but he can obstruct it in many ways and can perhaps tip off the Canadian government. All on the q.t., of course."

The boat swung east until it was following the mighty spine of the Rockies, an immensity of stone and forest and snow turning gold with sunset. Naysmith had spent several vacations here, camping and painting, and knew where he was headed. It was after dark when he slanted the boat downward, feeling his way with the radar.

There was an abandoned uranium-hunting base here, one of the shacks still habitable. Naysmith bounced the boat to a halt on the edge of a steep cliff, cut the engines, and yawned hugely. "End of the line," he said.

They climbed out, burdened with equipment, food, and the sleeping child. Naysmith wheeled the vehicle under a tall pine and led the way up a slope. Jeanne drew a lungful of the sharp moonlit air and sighed. "Martin, it's beautiful! Why didn't you ever take me here before?"

He didn't answer. His flashlight picked

out the crumbling face of the shack, its bare wood and metal blurred with many years. The door creaked open on darkness. Inside, it was bare, the flooring rotted away to a soft black mold, a few sticks of broken furniture scattered like bones. Taking a purchased axe, he went into the woods after spruce boughs, heaping them under the sleeping bags which Jeanne had laid out. Bobby whimpered a little in his dreams, but they didn't wake him to eat.

Naysmith's watch showed midnight before the cabin was in order. He strolled out for a final cigarette and Jeanne followed to stand beside him. Her fingers closed about his.

The moon was nearly full, rising over a peak whose heights were one glitter of snow. Stars wheeled enormously overhead, flashing in the keen cold air. The forests growing up the slant of this mountain souged with wind, tall and dark and heady-scented, filled with night and mystery. Down in the gorge there was a river, a long gleam of broken moonlight, the fresh wild noise of its brawling passage drifting up to them. Somewhere an owl hooted.

Jeanne shivered in the chill breeze and crept against Naysmith. He drew his mantle around both of them, holding her close. The little red eye of his cigarette waxed and waned in the dark.

"It's so lovely here," she whispered. "Do you have to go?"

"Yes." His answer came harshly out of his throat. "You've supplies enough for a month. If anyone chances by, then you're of course just a camper on vacation—but I doubt they will, this is an isolated spot. If I'm not back within three weeks, though, follow the river down—there's a small colony about fifty miles from here. Or I may send one of our agents to get you. He'll have a password . . . let's see . . . 'The crocodiles grow green in Ireland.' O.K.?"

Her laugh was muted and wistful.

"I'm sorry to lay such a burden on you, darling," he said contritely.

"It's nothing—except that you'll be away, a hunted man, and I won't know—" She bit her lip. Her face was white in the

streaming moon-glow. "This is a terrible world we live in."

"No, Jeanne. It's a . . . a potentially lovely world. My job is to help keep it that way." He chuckled her under the chin, fighting to smile. "Don't let it worry you. Good night, sweet princess."

She kissed him with a terrible yearning. For an instant Naysmith hung back. *Should I tell her? She's safely away now—she has a right to know I'm not her husband.*

"What's wrong, Marty? You seem so strange—"

I don't dare. I can't tell her—not while the enemy is abroad, not while there's a chance of their catching her. And a little longer in her fool's paradise—I can drop out of sight, let someone else give her the news. You coward!

He surrendered. But it was a cruel thing to know, that she was really clasping a dead man to her.

They walked slowly back to the cabin.

Colonel Samsey woke with an animal swiftness and sat up in bed. Sleep drained from him as he saw the tall figure etched black against his open balcony door. He grabbed for the gun under his pillow.

"I wouldn't try that, friend." The voice was soft. Moonlight streamed in to glitter on the pistol in the intruder's hand.

"Who are you?" Samsey gasped it out, hardly aware of the incredible fact yet. Why—he was a hundred and fifty stories up—his front entrance was guarded, and no copter could so silently have put this masked figure on his balcony—

"Out of bed, boy. Fast! O.K., now clasp your hands on top of your head."

Samsey felt the night wind cold on his body. It was a helplessness, this standing without his uniform and pistol-belt, looking down the muzzle of a stranger's gun. His close-cropped scalp felt stubbly under his palms.

"How did you get in?" he whispered.

Naysmith didn't feel it necessary to explain the process. He had walked from the old highway on which he had landed his jet and used vacuum shoes and gloves to climb the sheer face of Denver Unit. "Better ask why I came," he said.

"All right, blast you! Why? This is

a gross violation of privacy, plus menace and—" Samsey closed his mouth with a snap. Legality had plainly gone by the board.

"I want some information." Naysmith seated himself halfway on a table, one leg swinging easily, the gun steady in his right hand while his left fumbled in a belt pouch. "And you, as a high-ranking officer in the American Guard and a well-known associate of Roger Wade, seemed likeliest to have it."

"You're crazy! This is— We're just a patriotic society. You know that. Or should. We—"

"Cram it, Samsey," said Naysmith wearily. "The American Guard has ranks, uniforms, weapons, and drills. Every member belongs to the Americanist Party. You're a private army, Nazi style, and you've done the murders, robberies, and beatings of the Party for the past five years. As soon as the government is able to prove that in court, you'll all go to the Antarctic mines and you know it. Your hope is that your faction can be in power before there's a case against you."

"Libel! We're a patriotic social group—"

"I regret my approach," said Naysmith sardonically. And he did. Direct attack of this sort was not only unlawful, it was crude and of very limited value. But he hadn't much choice. He *had* to get some kind of line on the enemy's plans, and the outlawing of the Brotherhood and the general suspicion cast on the Service meant that standard detective approaches were pretty well eliminated for the time being. Half a loaf— "Nevertheless, I want certain information. The big objective right now is to overthrow the U.N. How do you intend to accomplish that? Specifically, what is your next assignment?"

"You don't expect—"

Samsey recoiled as Naysmith moved. The Un-man's left hand came out of his pouch like a striking snake even as his body hurtled across the floor. The right arm grasped Samsey's biceps, twisting him around in front of the intruder, a knee in his back, while the hypodermic needle plunged into his neck.

Samsey struggled, gasping. The muscles

holding him were like steel, cat-lithe, meeting his every wrench with practiced ease. And now the great wave of dizziness came, he lurched and Naysmith supported him, easing him back to the bed.

The hypo had been filled with four cubic centimeters of a neoscopaneurine mixture, very nearly a lethal dose. But it would act fast! Naysmith did not think the colonel had been immunized against such truth drugs—the gang wouldn't trust its lower echelons that much.

Moonlight barred the mindlessly drooling face on the pillow with a streak of icy silver. It was very quiet here, only the man's labored breathing and the sigh of wind blowing the curtains at the balcony door. Naysmith gave his victim a stimulant injection, waited a couple of minutes, and began his interrogation.

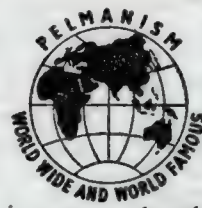
Truth drugs have been misnamed. They do not intrinsically force the subject to speak truth; they damp those higher brain centers needed to invent a lie or even to inhibit response. The subject babbles with a strong tendency to babble on those subjects he has previously been most concerned to keep secret; and a skilled psychologist can lead the general direction of the talk.

First, of course, the private nastinesses which every human has buried within himself came out, like suppuration from an inflamed wound. Naysmith had been through this before, but he grimaced—Samsey was an especially bad sort, a jungled darkness of perverted instinct. These aggressively manly types often were. Naysmith continued patiently until he got onto more interesting topics.

Samsey didn't know anyone higher in the gang than Wade. Well, that was to be expected. In fact, Naysmith thought scornfully, he, the outsider, knew more about the organization of the enemy than any one member below the very top ranks. But that was a pretty general human characteristic too—a man did his job, for whatever motives of power, profit, or simple existence he might have, and didn't even try to learn where it fitted into the great general pattern. The synthesizing mentality is tragically rare.

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encouraged them to do so; whereas totalitarianism, from the bossy foreman to the hemispheric dictator, was based on the deliberate suppression of communications. Where there was no feedback, there could be no stability except through the living death of imposed intellectual rigidity.

Back to business! Here came something he had been waiting for, the next task for the American Guard's thugs. The *Phobos* was due in from Mars in a week. Guardsmen were supposed to arrange the death of one Barney Rosenberg, passenger, as soon as possible after his debarkation on Earth. Why? The reason was not given and had not been asked for, but a good description of the man was available.

Mars—yes, the Guard was also using a privately owned spaceship to run arms to a secret base in the Thyle II country, where they were picked up by Pilgrims.

So! The Pilgrims were in on the gang. The Service had suspected as much, but here was proof. This might be the biggest break of all, but Naysmith had a hunch that it was incidental. Somehow, the murder of an obscure returnee from Mars impressed him as involving greater issues.

There wasn't more which seemed worth the risk of waiting. Naysmith had a final experiment to try.

Samsey was a rugged specimen, already beginning to pull out of his daze. Naysmith switched on a lamp, its radiance falling across the distorted face below him. The eyes focused blurrily on his sheening mask. Slowly, he lifted it.

"Who am I, Samsey?" he asked quietly.

A sob rattled in the throat. "Donner . . . but you're dead. We killed you in Chicago. You died, you're dead."

That settled that. Naysmith replaced his mask. Systematically, he repaired the alarms he had annulled for his entry and checked the room for traces of his presence. None. Then he took Samsey's gun from beneath the pillow. Silenced, naturally. He folded the lax fingers about the trigger and blew the colonel's brains out.

They'd suspect it wasn't suicide, of course, but they might not think of a biochemical autopsy before the drugs in the bloodstream had broken down be-

yond analysis. At least there was one less of them. Naysmith felt no qualms. This was not a routine police operation, it was war.

He went back to the balcony, closing the door behind him. Swinging over the edge as he adjusted his vacuum cups, he started the long climb earthward.

The Service could ordinarily have provided Naysmith with an excellent disguise, but the equipment needed was elaborate and he dared not assume that any of the offices which had it were unwatched by Security. Better rely on masks and the feeble observational powers of most citizens to brazen it out.

Calling Prior from a public communication booth, even using the scrambler, was risky too, but it had to be done. The mails were not to be trusted any more, and communication was an absolute necessity for accomplishment.

The voice was gray with weariness: "Mars, eh? Nice job, Naysmith. What should we do?"

"Get the word to Fourre, of course, for whatever he can make of it. And a coded radio message to our operatives on Mars. They can check this Pilgrim business and also look into Rosenberg's background and associates. Should be a lot of leads there. However, I'll try to snatch Rosenberg myself, with a Brother or two to help me, before the Americanists can get their hands on him."

"Yeah, you'd better. The Service's hands are pretty well tied just now while the U.N. investigation of the Chinese accusations is going on. Furthermore, we can't be sure of many of our own people. So we, and especially the Brotherhood, will have to act pretty much independently for the time being. Carry on as well as you can. However, I can get your information to Rio and Mars all right."

"Good man. How are things going with you?"

"Don't call me again, Naysmith. I'm being watched, and my own men can't stop a really all-out assassination attempt." Prior chuckled dryly. "If they succeed, we can talk it over in hell."

"To modify what the old cacique said about Spaniards in heaven—if there are nationalists in hell, I'm not sure if I want

to go there. O.K., then. And good luck!"

It was only the next day that newscasts carried word of the murder of one Nathan Prior, semanticist residing at Frisco Unit. It was believed to be the work of foreign agents, and S-men had been assigned to aid the local police.

CHAPTER IX.

MOST of the Brothers had, of course, been given disguises early in their careers. Plastic surgery had altered the distinctive countenance and the exact height, false fingerprints and retinals been put in their ID records—each of them had a matching set of transparent plastic "tips" to put on his own fingers when he made a print for any official purpose. These men should temporarily be safe, and there was no justification for calling on their help yet. They were sitting tight and wary, for if the deadly efficiency of Hessling's organization came to suspect them and pull them in, an elementary physical exam would rip the masquerade wide open.

That left perhaps a hundred undisguised Brothers in the United States when word came for them to go underground. Identical physique could be too useful—for example, in furnishing unshakable alibis, or in creating the legend of a superman who was everywhere—to be removed from all. Some of these would be able to assume temporary appearances and move in public for a while. The rest had to cross the border or hide.

The case of Juho Lampi was especially unfortunate. He had made enough of a name as a nucleonic engineer in Finland to be invited to America, and his disguise was only superficial. When Fourre's warning went out on the code circuit, he left his apartment in a hurry. A mechanic at the garage where he hired an airboat recognized the picture that had been flashed over the entire country. Lampi read the man's poorly hidden agitation, slugged him, and stole the boat, but it put the S-men on his trail. It told them, furthermore, that the identical men were not only American.

Lampi had been given the name and address of a woman in Iowa. The Brothers

were organized into cells of half a dozen, each with its own rendezvous and contacts, and this was to be Lampi's while he was in the States. He went there after dark and got a room. Somewhat later, Naysmith showed up—he, being more nearly a full-time operative, knew where several cells had their meeting places. He collected Lampi and decided not to wait for anyone else. The *Phobos* was coming to Earth in a matter of hours. Naysmith had gone to Iowa in a self-driver boat hired from a careless office in Colorado; now, through the woman running the house, the two men rented another and flew back to Robinson Field.

"I have my own boat—repainted, new number, and so on—parked near here," said Naysmith. "We'll take off in it—if we get away."

"And then what?" asked Lampi. His English was good, marked with only a trace of accent. All the Brothers were born linguists.

"I don't know. I just don't know." Naysmith looked moodily about him. "We're being hunted as few have ever been hunted." He murmured half to himself:

*"I heard myself proclaim'd;
And by the happy hollow of a tree
Escap'd the hunt. No port is free; no
place,
That guard and most unusual vigilance
Does not attend my taking."*

They were sitting in the Moon-jumper, bar and restaurant adjacent to the spaceport. They had chosen a booth near the door, and the transparent wall on this side opened onto the field. Its great pale expanse of concrete stretched under glaring floodlights out toward darkness, a gigantic loom of buildings on three sides of it. Coveralled mechanics were busy around a series of landing cradles. A uniformed policeman strolled by, speaking idly with a technician. Or was it so casual? The technic looked solemn.

"Oh, well," said Lampi. "To get onto a more cheerful subject, have you seen Warschawski's latest exhibition?"

"What's so cheerful about that?" asked Naysmith. "It's awful. Sculpture just

doesn't lend itself to abstraction as he seems to think."

Though the Brothers naturally tended to have similar tastes, environment could make a difference. Naysmith and Lampi plunged into a stiff-necked argument about modern art. It was going at a fine pace when they were interrupted.

The curtains of the booth had been drawn. They were twitched aside now and the waitress looked in. She was young and shapely, and the skimpy playsuit might have been painted on. Beyond her, the barroom was a surge of people, a buzz and hum and rumble of voices. In spite of the laboring ventilators, there was a blue haze of smoke in the air.

"Would you like another round?" asked the girl.

"Not just yet, thanks," said Naysmith, turning his masked face toward her. He had dyed his yellow hair a mousey brown at the hideaway, and Lampi's was now black, but that didn't help much; there hadn't been time to change the wiry texture. He sat stooped, so that she wouldn't see at a casual glance that he was as big as Lampi, and hoped she wasn't very observant.

"Want some company?" she asked. "I can fix it up."

"No, thanks," said Naysmith. "We're waiting for the rocket."

Naysmith paid the bill and when the waitress left, Lampi asked:

"What about the American Guardsmen?"

"Probably those burly characters lounging at the bar. Didn't you notice them as we came in? They'll have friends elsewhere who'll—"

"Your attention, please. The first tender from the Phobos will be cradling in ten minutes, carrying half the passengers from Mars. The second will follow ten minutes later. Repeat, the first—"

"Which one is Rosenberg on?" asked Lampi.

"How should I know?" Naysmith shrugged. "We'll just have to take our chance. Drink up."

He patted his shoulder-holstered gun and loosened the tunic over it. He and Lampi had obtained breastplates and half boots at the hideaway, their masks

were needle-proof, and an arm or thigh was hard to hit when a knee-length cloak flapped around the body. They should be fairly well immune to stet-guns if they worked fast. Not to bullets—but even the Guardsmen probably wouldn't care to use those in a crowd.

The two men went out of the booth and mingled with the people swirling toward the passenger egress. They separated as they neared the gate and hung about on the fringe of the group. There were a couple of big hard-looking men in masks who had shouldered their way up next to the gate. One of them had been in the Moonjumper, Naysmith remembered.

He had no picture of Rosenberg, and Samsey's incoherent description had been of little value. The man was a nonentity who must have been off Earth for years. But presumably the Guardsmen knew what to look for. Which meant that—

There was a red and yellow glare high in the darkened heavens. The far thunder became a howling, bellowing, shaking roar that trembled in the bones and echoed in the skull. Nerves crawled with the nameless half terror of unheard subsonic vibrations. The tender grew to a slim spearhead, backing down with radio control on the landing cradle. Her chemical blasts splashed vividly off the concrete baffles. When she lay still and the rockets cut off, there was a ringing silence.

Endless ceremony—the mechanics wheeled up a stairway, the air lock ground open, a steward emerged, medical crew stood by to handle space sickness—Naysmith longed for a cigarette. He shifted on his feet and forced his nerves to a semblance of calm.

There came the passengers, half a dozen of them filing toward the gateway. They stopped one by one at the clearance booth to have their papers stamped. The two Guardsmen exchanged a masked glance.

A stocky Oriental came through first. Then there was a woman engineer in Spaceways uniform who held up the line as she gathered two waiting children into her arms. Then—

He was a small bandy-legged man with a hooked nose and a leathery brown skin,

shabbily clad, lugging a battered valise. One of the Guardsmen tapped him politely on the arm. He looked up and Naysmith saw his lips moving, the face etched in a harsh white glare. He couldn't hear what was said over the babble of the crowd, but he could imagine it. "Why, yes, I'm Barney Rosenberg. What do you want?"

Some answer was given him—it didn't really matter what. With a look of mild surprise, the little fellow nodded. The other Guardsman pushed over to him, and he went out of the crowd between them. Naysmith drew his stet-gun, holding it under his cloak, and cat-footed after. The Guardsmen didn't escort Rosenberg into the shadows beyond the field, but walked over toward the Moon-jumper. There was no reason for Rosenberg to suspect their motives, especially if they stood him a drink.

Naysmith lengthened his stride and fell in beside the right-hand man. He didn't waste time: his gun was ready, its muzzle against the victim's hip. He fired. The Guardsman strangled on a yell.

Lampi was already on the left, but he'd been a trifle slow. The enemy grabbed the Finn's gun wrist with a slashing movement. Naysmith leaned over the first Guardsman, who clawed at him as he sagged to his knees, and brought the edge of his left palm down on the second one's neck, just at the base of the skull. The blow cracked numbingly back into his own sinews.

"What the blazes—" Rosenberg opened his mouth to shout. There was no time to argue, and Lampi needled him. With a look of utter astonishment, the prospector wilted. Lampi caught him under the arms and hoisted him to one shoulder.

The kidnapping had been seen. People were turning around, staring. Somebody began to scream. Lampi stepped over the two toppled men and followed Naysmith.

Past the door of the bar, out to the street, hurry!

A whistle skirled behind them. They jumped over the slideway and dashed across the avenue. There was a transcontinental Diesel truck bearing down on them, its lights one great glare, the roar of its engine filling the world. Naysmith

thought that it brushed him. But its huge bulk was a cover. They plunged over the slideway beyond, ignoring the stares of passersby, and into the shadows of a park.

A siren began to howl. When he had reached the sheltering gloom thrown by a tree, Naysmith looked behind him. Two policemen were coming, but they hadn't spotted the fugitives yet. Naysmith and Lampi ducked through a formal garden, jumping hedges and running down twisted paths. Gravel scrunched underfoot.

Quartering across the park, Naysmith led the way to his airboat. He fumbled the door open and slithered inside. Lampi climbed in with him, tossing Rosenberg into the back seat and slamming the door. The boat slid smoothly out into passing traffic. There were quite a few cars and boats abroad, and Naysmith mingled with them.

Lampi breathed heavily in the gloom. A giant neon sign threw a bloody light over his faceless mask. "Now what?" he asked.

"Now we get the devil out of here," said Naysmith. "Those boys are smart. It won't take them long to alert traffic control and stop all nearby vehicles for search. We have to be in the air before that time."

They left the clustered shops and dwellings, and Naysmith punched the board for permission to take off south-bound. The automatic signal flashed him a fourth-lane directive. He climbed to the indicated height and went obediently south on the beam. Passing traffic was a stream of moving stars around him.

The emergency announcement signal blinked an angry red. "Fast is right," said Lampi, swearing in four languages.

"Up we go," said Naysmith.

He climbed vertically, narrowly missing boats in the higher levels, until he was above all lanes. He kept climbing till his vehicle was in the lower stratosphere. Then he turned westward at top speed.

"We'll go out over the Pacific," he explained. "Then we find us a nice uninhabited islet with some trees and lie doggo till tomorrow night. Won't be any too comfortable, but it'll have to be done

and I have some food along." He grinned beneath his mask. "I hope you like cold canned beans, Juho."

"And then—?"

"I know another island off the California coast," said Naysmith. "We'll disguise this boat at our first stop, of course, changing the number and recognition signal and so on. Then at the second place we'll refuel and I'll make an important call. You can bet your last mark the enemy knows who pulled this job and will have alerted all fuel station operators this time. But the man where we're going is an absent-minded old codger who won't be hard to deceive." He scowled. "That'll take about the last of my cash money, too. Have to get more somehow, if we're to carry on in our present style."

"Where do we go from there?" asked Lampi.

"North, I suppose. We have to hide Rosenberg somewhere, and you—" Naysmith shook his head, feeling a dull pain within him. That was the end of the masquerade. Jeanne Donner would know.

At first Barney Rosenberg didn't believe it. He was too shocked by this violence of events. The Guardsmen had simply told him they were representatives of some vaguely identified company which was thinking of developments on Mars and wanted to consult him—he'd been offered a hotel suite and had been told the fee would be nice. Now he looked at his kidnappers with bewildered eyes and challenged them to say who they were.

"Think we'd be fools enough to carry our real IDs around?" snorted Naysmith. "You'll just have to take our word for it that we're U.N. operatives—till later, anyway, when we can safely prove it. I tell you, the devil is loose on Earth and you need protection. Those fellows were after your knowledge, and once they got that you'd have been a corpse."

Rosenberg looked from one masked face to the other. His head felt blurred, the drug was still in him and he couldn't think straight. But those voices—

He thought he remembered the voices. Both of them. Only they were the same.

"I don't know anything," he said

weakly. "I tell you, I'm just a prospector, home from Mars."

"You must have information—that's the only possibility," said Lampi. "Something you learned on Mars which is important to them, perhaps to the whole world. What?"

Fieri in Drygulch, and the Pilgrim who had been so eager—

Rosenberg shook his head, trying to clear it. He looked at the two big cloaked figures hemming him in. There was darkness outside the hurtling airboat.

"Who are you?" he whispered.

"I told you we're friends. Un-men. Secret agents." Naysmith laid a hand on Rosenberg's shoulder. "We want to help you, that's all. We want to protect you and whatever it is you know."

Rosenberg looked at the hand—strong, sinewy, blunt-fingered, with fine gold hairs on the knuckles. But no, no, no, his heart began thumping till he thought it must shatter his ribs.

"Let me see your faces," he gasped.

"Well . . . why not?" Naysmith and Lampi took off their masks. The dull panel light gleamed off the same features, broad, strong-boned, blue-eyed. There was a deep wrinkle above each jutting triangle of nose. The left ear was faintly bigger than the right. Both men had a trick of cocking their head a trifle sideways when listening.

We'll tell him we're twin brothers, thought Naysmith and Lampi simultaneously.

Rosenberg shrank into the seat. There was a tiny whimper in his throat.

"Stef," he murmured shakingly. "Stefan Rostomily."

CHAPTER X.

THE newscasts told of crisis in the U.N. Etienne Fourre, backed by its president, was claiming that the Chinese government was pressing a fantastic charge to cover up designs of its own. A full-dress investigation was in order. Only—as Besser, minister of international finance, pointed out—when the official investigating service was itself under suspicion, who could be trusted to get at the facts?

In the United States, Security was after

a dangerous spy and public enemy. Minute descriptions of Donner-Naysmith-Lampi were on all the screens. Theoretically, the American president could call off the hunt, but that would mean an uproar in the delicately balanced Congress; there'd have been a vote of confidence, and if the president lost that he and his cabinet would have to resign—and who would be elected to succeed? But Naysmith and Lampi exchanged grins at the interview statement of the president, that he thought this much-hunted spy was in Chinese pay.

Officially, Canada was co-operating with the United States in chasing the fugitive. Actually, Naysmith was sure it was bluff, a sop to the anti-U.N. elements in the Dominion. Mexico was doing nothing—but that meant the Mexican border was being closely watched.

It couldn't go on. The situation was so unstable that it would have to end, one way or another, in the next several days. If Hessling's men dragged in a Brother—well—whether or not Fourre's organization survived, it would have lost its greatest and most secret asset.

But the main thing, Naysmith reflected grimly, was to keep Fourre's own head above water. The whole purpose of this uproar was to discredit the man and his painfully built-up service, and to replace him and his key personnel with nationalist stooges. After that, the enemy would find the next stages of their work simple.

And what can I do?

Naysmith felt a dark surge of helplessness. Human society had grown too big, too complex and powerful. It was a machine running blind and wild, and he was a fly caught in the gears and stamped into nothingness. There was one frail governor on the machine, only one, and if it were broken the whole thing would shatter into ruin. What to do? What to do?

He shrugged off the despair and concentrated on the next moment. The first thing was to get Rosenberg's information to his own side.

The island was a low sandy swell in an immensity of ocean. There was harsh grass on it, and a few trees gnarled by the great winds, and a tiny village. Naysmith dropped Lampi on the farther side

of the island to hide till they came back for him. Rosenberg took the Finn's mask, and the two jetted across to the fuel station. While their boat's tanks were being filled, they entered a public communibooth.

Peter Christian, in Mexico City—Naysmith dialed the number given him by Prior. That seemed the best bet—and wasn't the kid undergoing Synthesis training? His logic might be able to integrate this meaningless flux of data.

No doubt every call across either border was being monitored—illegally but thoroughly. However, the booth had a scrambler unit. Naysmith fed it a coin, but didn't activate it immediately.

"Could I speak to Peter Christian?" he asked the servant whose face appeared in the screen. "Tell him it's his cousin Joe calling. And give him this message: 'The ragged scoundrel leers merrily, not peddling babies.'"

"Señor?" The brown face looked astonished.

"It's a private signal. Write it down, please, so you get it correct." Naysmith dictated slowly. "'The ragged scoundrel—'"

"Yes, understand. Wait, please, I will call the young gentleman."

Naysmith stood watching the screen for a moment. He could vaguely make out the room beyond, a solid and handsomely furnished place. Then he stabbed at the scrambler buttons. There were eight of them, which could be punched in any order to yield 40,320 possible combinations. The key letters, known to every Brother, were currently MNTSRPBL, and "the ragged scoundrel" had given Christian the order Naysmith was using. When Hessling's men got around to playing back their monitor tapes, the code sentence wouldn't help them unscramble without knowledge of the key. On the other hand, it wouldn't be proof that their quarry had been making the call; such privacy devices were not uncommon.

Naysmith blanked the booth's walls and removed his own and Rosenberg's masks. The little man was in a state of hypnosis, total recall of the Fieri manuscript he had read on Mars. He was

already drawing structural formulas of molecules.

The random blur and noise on the screen clicked away as Peter Christian set the scrambler unit at that end. It was his own face grown younger which looked out at Naysmith—a husky blond sixteen-year-old, streaked with sweat and panting a little. He grinned at his Brother.

"Sorry to be so long," he said. "I was working out in the gym. Have a new mech-volley play to develop which looks promising." His English was fluent and Naysmith saw no reason to use a Spanish which, in his own case, had grown a little rusty.

"Who're you the adoptive son of?" asked the man. Privacy customs didn't mean much in the Brotherhood.

"Holger Christian—Danish career diplomat, currently ambassador to Mexico. They're good people, he and his wife."

Yes, thought Naysmith, they would be, if they let their foster child, even with his obvious brilliance, take Synthesis. The multi-ordinal integrating education was so new and untried, and its graduates would have to make their own jobs. But the need was desperate. The sciences had grown too big and complex, like everything else, and there was too much overlap between the specialties. Further progress required the fully trained synthesizing mentality.

And progress itself was no longer something justified only by Victorian prejudice. It was a matter of survival. Some means of creating a stable social and economic order in the face of continuous revolutionary change had to be found. More and more technological development was bitterly essential. Atomic-powered oil synthesis had come barely in time to save a fuel-starved Earth from industrial breakdown—now new atomic energy fuels had to be evolved before the old ores were depleted. The rising incidence of neurosis and insanity among the intelligent and apathy among the insensitive had to be checked before other Years of Madness came. Heredity damaged by hard radiation had to be unscrambled—somehow—before dangerous recessive traits spread through the entire human population. Communi-

cations theory, basic to modern science and sociology, had to be perfected. There had to be—Why enumerate? Man had come too far and too fast. Now he was balanced on a knife edge over the red gulfs of hell.

When Peter Christian's education was complete, he would be one of Earth's most important men—whether he realized it himself or not. Of course, even his foster parents didn't know that one of his Synthesis instructors was an Un-man who was quietly teaching him the fine points of a secret service. They most assuredly did not know that their so normal and healthy boy was already initiated into a group whose very existence was an unrecorded secret.

The first Brothers had been raised in the families of Un-man technicians and operators who had been in on the project from the start. This practice continued on a small scale, but most of the new children were put out for adoption through recognized agencies around the world—having first been provided with a carefully faked background history. Between sterility and the fear of mutation, there was no difficulty in placing a good-looking man child with a superior family. From babyhood, the Brother was under the influence—a family friend or a pediatrician or instructor or camp counselor or minister, anyone who could get an occasional chance to talk intimately with the boy, would be a spare-time employee of Foure's and helped incline the growing personality the right way. It had been established that a Brother could accept the truth and keep his secret from the age of twelve, and that he never refused to turn Un-man. From then on, progress was quicker. The Brothers were precocious: Naysmith was only twenty-five, and he had been on his first mission at seventeen; Lampi was an authority in his field at twenty-three. There should be no hesitation in dumping this responsibility on Christian, even if there had been any choice in the matter.

"Listen," said Naysmith, "you know all hell has broken loose and that the American S-men are out to get us. Specifically, I'm the one they think they're hunting. But Lampi, a Finnish Brother,

and I have put the snatch on one Barney Rosenberg from Mars. He has certain information the enemy wants." The man knew what the boy must be thinking—in a way, those were his own thoughts—and added swiftly: "No, we haven't let him in on the secret, though the fact that he was a close friend of Rostomily's makes it awkward. But it also makes him trust us. He read the report of a Fieri on Mars, concerning suspended animation techniques. He'll give it to you now. Stand by to record."

"O.K., *ja st.*" Christian grinned and flipped a switch. He was still young enough to find this a glorious cloak-and-dagger adventure. Well, he'd learn, and the learning would be a little death within him.

Rosenberg began to talk, softly and very fast, holding up his structural formulas and chemical equations at the appropriate places. It took a little more than an hour. Christian would have been bored if he hadn't been so interested in the material; Naysmith fumed and sweated unhappily. Any moment there might come suspicion, discovery—The booth was hot.

"That's all, I guess," said Naysmith when the prospector had run down. "What do you make of it?"

"Why, it's sensational! It'll jump biology two decades!" Christian's eyes glowed. "Surgery . . . yes, that's obvious. Research techniques—*Gud Fader i him-len*, what a discovery!"

"And why do you think it's so important to the enemy?" snapped Naysmith, rather impatiently.

"Isn't it plain? The military uses, man! You can use a light dose to immunize against terrific accelerations. Or you can pack a spaceship with men in frozen sleep, load 'em in almost like boxes, and have no supply worries en route. Means you can take a good-sized army from planet to planet. And of course there's the research aspect. With what can be learned with the help of suspension techniques, biological warfare can be put on a wholly new plane."

"I thought as much." Naysmith nodded wearily. It was the same old story, the worn-out tale of hate and death and

oppression. The logical end-product of scientific warfare was that *all* data became military secrets—a society without communication in its most vital department, without feed-back or stability. That was what he fought against. "All right, what can you do about it?"

"I'll unscramble the record . . . no, better leave it scrambled . . . and get it to the right people. Hm-m-m—give me a small lab and I'll undertake to develop certain phases of this myself. In any case, we can't let the enemy have it."

"We've probably already given it to them. Chances are they have monitors on this line. But they can't get around to our recording and to trying all possible unscrambling combinations in less than a few days, especially if we keep them busy." Naysmith leaned forward, his haggard eyes probing into the screen. "Pete, as the son of a diplomat you must have a better than average notion of the overall politico-military picture. What can we do?"

Christian sat still for a moment. There was a curious withdrawn expression on the young face. His trained mind was assembling logic networks in a manner unknown to all previous history. Finally he looked back at the man.

"There's about an eighty per cent probability that Besser is the head of the gang," he said. "Chief of international finance, you know. That's an estimate of my own; I don't have Fourre's data, but I used a basis of Besser's past history and known character, his country's recent history, the necessary communications for a least-effort anti-U.N. setup on a planetary scale, the . . . never mind. You already know with high probability that Roger Wade is his chief for North America. I can't predict Besser's actions very closely, since in spite of his prominence he uses privacy as a cover-up for relevant psychological data, but if we assume that he acts on a survival axiom, and logically apart from his inadequate grounding in modern socio-theory and his personal bias . . . hm-m-m."

"Besser, eh? I had my own suspicions, besides what I've been told. Financial integration has been proceeding rather slowly since he took office. Never mind.

We have to strike at his organization. What to do?"

"I need more data. How many American Brothers are underground in the States and can be contacted?"

"How should I know? All that could would try to skip the country. I'm only here because I know enough of the overall situation to act usefully. I hope."

"Well, I can scare up a few in Mexico and South America, I think. We have our own communications. And I can use my 'father's' sealed diplomatic circuit to get in touch with Fourre. You have this Lampi with you, I suppose?" Christian sat in moody stillness for a while. Then:

"I can only suggest—and it's a pretty slim guess—that you two let yourselves be captured."

The man sighed. He had rather expected this.

Naysmith brought the boat whispering down just as the first cold light of sunrise crept skyward. He buzzed the narrow ledge where he had to land, swung back, and lowered the wheels. When they touched, it was a jarring, brutal contact that rattled his teeth together. He cut the motor and there was silence.

If Jeanne was alert, she'd have a gun on him now. He opened the door and called loudly: "The crocodiles grow green in Ireland." Then he stepped out and looked around him.

The mountains were a high shadowy loom of mystery. Dawn lay like roses on their peaks. The air was fresh and chill, strong with the smell of pines, and there was dew underfoot and alarmed birds clamoring into the glowing sky. Far below him, the river thundered and brawled in an echoing hollowness.

Rosenberg climbed stiffly after him and leaned against the boat. Earth gravity dragged at his muscles, he was cold and hungry and cruelly tired, and these men who were ghosts of his youth would not tell him what the darkness was that lay over the world. Sharply he remembered the thin bitter sunup of Mars, a gaunt desert misting into life and a single crag etched against loneliness. Homesickness was an ache in him.

Only—he had not remembered Earth could be so lovely.

"Martin! Oh, Martin!" The woman came down the train, running, slipping on the wet needles. Her raven hair was cloudy about the gallantly lifted head, and there was a light in her eyes which Rosenberg had almost forgotten. "Oh, my darling, you're back!"

Naysmith held her close. One minute more, one little minute before Lampi emerged, was that too much?

He hadn't been able to leave the Finn anywhere behind. There was no safe hiding place in all America, not when the S-men were after him. There could be no reliable rendezvous later, and Lampi would be needed. He had to come along.

Of course, the Finn could have stayed masked and mute all the while he was at the cabin. But Rosenberg would have to be left here, it was the best hideaway for him. The prospector might be trusted to keep secret the fact that two identical men had brought him here—or he might not. He was shrewd, Jeanne's conversation would lead him to some suspicion of the truth, and he might easily decide that she had been the victim of a shabby trick and should be given the facts. Then anything could happen.

Oh, with some precautions Naysmith could probably hide his real nature from the girl a while longer. Rosenberg might very well keep his mouth shut on request. But there was no longer any point in concealing the facts from her—she would not be captured by the gang before they had the Un-man himself. And sooner or later she must in all events be told. The man she thought was her husband was probably going to die, and it was as well that she think little of him and have no fears and sorrows on his account. One death was enough for her.

He laid his hands on the slim shoulders and stood back a bit, looking into her eyes. His own crinkled in the way she must know so well, and they were unnaturally bright in the pale dawn-glow. When he spoke, it was almost a whisper.

"Jeanne, honey, I've got some bad news for you."

He felt her stiffen beneath his hands, saw the face tighten and heard the little

CHAPTER XI.

hiss of indrawn breath. There were dark rings about her eyes, she couldn't have slept very well while he was gone.

"This is a matter for absolute secrecy," he went on, tonelessly. "No one—I repeat no one—is to have a word of it. But you have a right to the truth."

"Go ahead." There was an edge of harshness in her voice. "I can take it."

"I'm not Martin Donner," he said. "Your husband is dead."

She stood rigid for another heartbeat, and then she pulled wildly free. One hand went to her mouth. The other was half lifted as if to fend him off.

"I had to pretend it, to get you away without any fuss," he went on, looking at the ground. "The enemy would have . . . tortured you, maybe. Or killed you and Bobby. I don't know."

Juho Lampi came up behind Naysmith. There was compassion on his face. Jeanne stepped backward, voiceless.

"You'll have to stay here," said Naysmith bleakly. "It's the only safe place. This is Mr. Rosenberg, whom we're leaving with you. I assure you he's completely innocent of anything that has been done. I can't tell either of you more than this." He took a long step toward her. She stood her ground, unmoving. When he clasped her hands into his, they were cold. "Except that I love you," he whispered.

Then, swinging away, he faced Lampi. "We'll clean up and get some breakfast here," he said. "After that, we're off."

Jeanne did not follow them inside. Bobby, awakened by their noise, was delighted to have his father back—Lampi had re-assumed a mask—but Naysmith gave him disappointingly little attention. He told Rosenberg that the three of them should stay put here as long as possible before striking out for the village, but that it was hoped to send a boat for them in a few days.

Jeanne's face was cold and bloodless as Naysmith and Lampi went back to the jet. When it was gone, she started to cry. Rosenberg wanted to leave and let her have it out by herself, but she clung to him blindly and he comforted her as well as he could.

THERE was no difficulty about getting captured. Naysmith merely strolled into a public lavatory at Oregon Unit and took off his mask to wash his face; a man standing nearby went hurriedly out, and when Naysmith emerged he was knocked over by the stet-gun of a Unit policeman. It was what came afterward that was tough.

He woke up, stripped and handcuffed, in a cell, very shortly before a team of S-men arrived to lead him away. These took the added precaution of binding his ankles before stuffing him into a jet. He had to grin sourly at that, it was a compliment of sorts. Little was said until the jet came down on a secret headquarters which was also a Wyoming ranch.

There they gave him the works. He submitted meekly to every identification procedure he had ever heard of. Fluoroscopes showed nothing hidden within his body except the communicator, and there was some talk of operating it out; but they decided to wait for orders from higher up before attempting that. They questioned him and, since he had killed two or three of their fellows, used methods which cost him a couple of teeth and a sleepless night. He told them his name and address, but little else.

Orders came the following day. Naysmith was bundled into another jet and flown eastward. Near the destination, the jet was traded for an ordinary, inconspicuous airboat. They landed after dark on the grounds of a large new mansion in western Pennsylvania—Naysmith recalled that Roger Wade lived here—and he was led inside. There was a soundproofed room with a full battery of interrogation machines under the residential floors. The prisoner was put into a chair already equipped with straps, fastened down, and left for a while to ponder his situation.

He sighed and attempted to relax, leaning back against the metal of the chair. It was an uncomfortable seat, cold and stiff as it pressed into his naked skin. The room was long and low-ceilinged, barren in the white glare of high-powered fluoros, and the utter stillness of it muffled his

breath and heartbeat. The air was cool, but somehow that absorbent quiet choked him. He faced the impassive dials of a lie detector and an electric neurovibrator, and the silence grew and grew.

His head ached, and he longed for a cigarette. His eyelids were sandy with sleeplessness and there was a foul taste in his mouth. Mostly, though, he thought of Jeanne Donner.

Presently the door at the end of the room opened and a group of people walked slowly toward him. He recognized Wade's massive form in the van. Behind him trailed a bearded man with a lean, sallow face; a young chap thin as a rail, his skin dead white and his hands clenching and unclenching nervously; a gaunt and homely woman; and a squat, burly subordinate whom he did not know but assumed to be an S-man in Wade's pay. The others were familiar to Service dossiers: Lewin, Wade's personal physician; Rodney Borrow, his chief secretary; Marta Jennings, Americanist organizer. There was death in their eyes.

Wade proceeded quietly up toward Naysmith. Borrow drew a chair for him and he sat down in it and took out a cigarette. Nobody spoke till he had it lighted. Then he blew the smoke in Naysmith's direction and said gently: "According to the official records, you really are Norbert Naysmith of California. But tell me, is that only another false identity?"

Naysmith shrugged. "Identity is a philosophical basic," he answered. "Where does similarity leave off and identity begin?"

Wade nodded slowly. "We've killed you at least once, and I suspect more than once. But are you Martin Donner, or are you his twin? And in the latter case, how does it happen that you two—or you three, four, five, ten thousand—are completely identical?"

"Oh, not quite," said Naysmith.

"No-o-o. There are the little scars and peculiarities due to environment—and habits, language, accent, occupation. But for police purposes you and Donner are the same man. How was it done?"

Naysmith smiled. "How much am I offered for that information?" he parried.

"As well as other information you know I have?"

"So." Wade's eyes narrowed. "You weren't captured—not really. You gave yourself up."

"Maybe. Have you caught anyone else yet?"

Wade traded a glance with the Security officer. Then, with an air of decision, he said briskly: "An hour ago, I was informed that a man answering your description had been picked up in Minnesota. He admitted to being one Juho Lampi of Finland, and I'm inclined to take his word for it though we haven't checked port-of-entry records yet. How many more of you can we expect to meet?"

"As many as you like," said Naysmith. "Maybe more than that."

"All right. You gave yourself up. You must know that we have no reason to spare your life—or lives. What do you hope to gain?"

"A compromise," answered Naysmith. "Which will, of course, involve our release."

"How much are you willing to tell us now?"

"As little as possible, naturally. We'll have to bargain."

Stall! Stall for time! The message from Rio has got to come soon—it's got to, or we're all dead men.

Borrow leaned over his master's shoulder. His voice was high and cracked, stuttering just a trifle: "How will we know you're telling the truth?"

"How will you know that even if you torture me?" shrugged Naysmith. "Your bird dogs must have reported that I've been immunized to drugs."

"There are still ways," said Lewin. His words fell dull in the muffling silence. "Prefrontal lobotomy is usually effective."

Yes, this is the enemy. These are the men of darkness. These are the men who in other days sent heretics to burning, or fed the furnaces of Belsen, or stuffed the rockets with radioactive death. Now they're opening skulls and slashing brains across. Argue with them! Let them kick and slug and whip you, but don't let them know—

"Our bargain might not be considered valid if you do that."

"The essential element of a bargain," said Wade pompously, "is the free will and desire of both parties. You're not free."

"But I am. You've killed one of me and captured two others. How do you know the number of me which is still running loose, out there in the night?"

Borrow and Jennings flickered uneasy eyes toward the smooth bare walls. The woman shuddered, ever so faintly.

"We needn't be so clumsy about this," said Lewin. "There's the lie detector, first of all—its value is limited, but this man is too old to have had Synthesis training, so he can't fool it much. Then there are instruments that make a man quite anxious to talk. I have a chlorine generator here, Naysmith. How would you like to breathe a few whiffs of chlorine?"

"Or just a vise—applied in the right place," snapped Jennings.

"Hold up a minute," ordered Wade. "Let's find out how much he wants to reveal without such persuasion."

"I said I'd trade information, not give

it away," said Naysmith. He wished the sweat weren't running down his face and body for all of them to see. The reek of primitive, uncontrollable fear was sharp in his nostrils—not the fear of death, but of the anguish and mutilation which were worse than oblivion.

"What do you want to know?" snapped the Security officer contemptuously.

"Well," said Naysmith, "first off, I'd like to know your organization's purpose."

"What's that?" Wade's heavy face blinked at him, and an angry flush mottled his cheeks. "Let's not play crêche games. You know what we want."

"No, seriously, I'm puzzled." Naysmith forced mildness into his tones. "I realize you don't like the *status quo* and want to change it. But you're all well off now. What do you hope to gain?"

"What—That will do!" Wade gestured to the officer, and Naysmith's head rang with a rock-fisted buffet. "We haven't time to listen to your bad jokes."

Naysmith grinned viciously. If he could get them mad, play on those twisted

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emotions till the unreasoning thalamus controlled them—it would be hard on him, but it would delay their real aims. "Oh, I can guess," he said. "It's personal, isn't it? None of you really know what's driving you to this—except for the stupid jackals who're in with you merely because it pays better than any work they could get on their own merits. Like you, for instance." He glanced at the S-man and sneered deliberately.

"Shut up!" This time the blow was to his jaw. Blood ran thinly out of his mouth, and he sagged a little against the straps that held him. But his voice lifted raggedly.

"Take Miss Jennings, for one. Not that I would, even if you paid me. You're all twisted up inside, aren't you—too ugly to get a man, too scared of yourself to get a surgical remodeling. You're trying your clumsy best to sublimate it into patriotism—and what kind of symbol is a flagpole? I notice it was you who made that highly personal suggestion about torturing me."

She drew back, and there was the rage of a whipped animal in her. The S-man took out a piece of hose, but Wade gestured him away. The leader's face had gone wooden.

"Or Lewin—another case of psychotic frustration." Naysmith smiled, a close-lipped and unpleasant smile of bruised lips, at the doctor. "I warrant you'd work for free if you hadn't been hired. A two-bit sadist has trouble finding outlets these days.

"Now we come to Rodney Borrow."

"Shut up!" cried the thin man. He edged forward. Wade swept him back with a heavy arm.

"Exogene!" Naysmith's smile grew warm, almost pitying. "It's too bad that human exogenesis was developed during the Years of Madness, when moral scruples went to hell and scientists were as fanatical as everyone else. They grew you in a tank, Borrow, and your prenatal life, which every inherited instinct said should be warm and dark and sheltered, was one hell of a study—bright lights, probes, microslides taken of your tissues— They learned a lot about human fetus, but they should have killed you

instead of letting such a pathetic quivering mass of psychoses walk around alive. If you could call it life, Exogene."

Borrow lunged past Wade. There was slaver running from his lips, and he clawed for Naysmith's eyes. The S-man pulled him back and suddenly he collapsed, weeping hysterically. Naysmith shuddered beneath his skin. *There but for the grace of God—*

"And how about myself?" asked Wade. "These amateur analyses are most amusing. Please continue."

"Guilt drive. Overcompensation. The Service has investigated your childhood and adolescent background and—"

"And?"

"Come on, Roger. It's fun. It won't hurt a bit."

The big man sat stiff as an iron bar. For a long moment there was nothing, no sound except Borrow's sobs, no movement, and his face turned gray.

When he spoke, it was as if he were strangling: "I think you'd better start that chlorine generator, Lewin."

"With pleasure!"

Naysmith shook his head. "And you people want to run things," he murmured. "We're supposed to turn over a world slowly recovering its sanity to the likes of you."

The generator began to hiss and bubble at his back. He could have turned his head to watch it, but that would have been a defeat. And he needed every scrap of pride remaining in this ultimate loneliness.

"Let me run the generator," whispered Borrow.

"No," said Lewin. "You might kill him too fast."

"Maybe we should wait till they bring this Lampi here," said Jennings. "Let him watch us working Naysmith over."

Wade shook his head. "Maybe later," he said.

"I notice that you still haven't tried to find out what I'm willing to tell you without compulsion," interjected Naysmith.

"Well, go ahead," said Wade in a flat voice. "We're listening."

A little time, just a little more time, if I can spin them a yarn—

"Etienne Fourre has more resources than you know," declared Naysmith. "A counterblow has been prepared which will cost you dearly. But since it would also put quite a strain on us, we're willing to discuss—if not a permanent compromise, for there can obviously be none, at least an armistice. That's why—"

A chime sounded. "Come in," said Wade loudly. His voice activated the door and a man entered.

"Urgent call for you, Mr. Wade," he reported. "Scrambled."

"All right." The leader got up. "Hold off on that chlorine till I get back, Lewin." He went out.

When the door had closed behind him, Lewin said calmly: "Well, he didn't tell us to refrain from other things, did he?"

They took turns using the hose. Naysmith's mind grew a little hazy with pain. But they dared not inflict real damage, and it didn't last long.

Wade came back. He ignored Lewin, who was hastily pocketing the truncheon, and said curtly: "We're going on a trip. All of us. Now."

The word had come. Naysmith sank back, breathing hard. Just at that instant, the relief from pain was too great for him to think of anything else. It took him several minutes to start worrying about whether Peter Christian's logic had been correct, and whether the Service could fulfill its part, and even whether the orders that came to Wade had been the right ones.

CHAPTER XII.

It was late afternoon before Barney Rosenberg had a chance to talk with Jeanne Donner, and then it was she who sought him out. He had wandered from the cabin after lunch, scrambling along the mountainside and strolling through the tall forest. But Earth gravity tired him, and he returned in a few hours. Even then, he didn't go back to the cabin, but found a log near the rim of the gorge and sat down to think.

So this was Earth.

It was a cool and lovely vision which opened before him. The cliffs tumbled down in a sweep of gray and slaty blue, down and down into the huge sounding

canyon of the river. On the farther side, the mountain lifted in a mist of dim purple, up to its sun-blazing snow and the vastness beyond. There were bushes growing on the slopes that fell riverward, a gallantry of green blurring the severe rock, here and there a cluster of berries like fire. Behind Rosenberg and on either side were the trees, looming pine in a cavern of shadow, slim whispering beech, ash with the streaming, blinding, raining sunlight snared in its leaves. He had not remembered how much color there was on this planet.

And it was alive with sound. The trees murmured. The noise of the river drifted up, cold and fresh and boisterous. Mosquitoes buzzed thinly around his ears. A bird was singing—he didn't know what kind of bird, but it had a wistful liquid trill that haunted his thoughts, and another answered in whistles, and somewhere a third was chattering and chirping its gossip of the sun. A squirrel darted past like a red comet, and he heard the tiny scrabble of its claws.

And the smells—the infinite living world of odors, pine and mold and wild flowers and the river mist! He had almost forgotten he owned a sense of smell, in the tanked sterility of Mars.

Oh, his muscles ached and he was lonely for the grim bare magnificence of the deserts and he wondered how he would ever fit into this savage world of men against men. But still—Earth was home, and a billion years of evolution could not be denied.

Some day Mars would be a full-grown planet and its people would be rich and free. Rosenberg shook his head, smiling a little. Poor Martians!

There was a light footstep behind him. He turned and saw Jeanne Donner approaching. She had on a light blouse-and-slack outfit which didn't hide the grace of her or the weariness, and the sun gleamed darkly in her hair. Rosenberg stood up with a feeling of awkwardness.

"Please sit down." Her voice was grave, somehow remote. "I'd like to join you for a little while, if I may."

"By all means." Rosenberg lowered himself again to the mossy trunk. It was cool and yielding, a little damp, under

his hand. Jeanne sat beside him, elbows on knees. For a moment she was quiet, looking over the sun-flooded land. Then she took out a pack of cigarettes and held them toward the man. "Smoke?" she asked.

"Uh . . . no, thanks. I got out of the habit on Mars. Oxygen's too scarce, usually—we chew instead, if we can afford tobacco at all."

She lit a cigarette for herself and drew hard on it, sucking in her cheeks. He saw how fine the underlying bony structure was. Well—Stef had always picked the best women, and gotten them.

"We'll rig a bed for you," she said. "Cut some spruce boughs and put them under a sleeping bag. Makes a good doss."

"Thanks." They sat without talking for a while. The cigarette smoke blew away in ragged streamers. Rosenberg could hear the wind whistling and piping far up the canyon.

"I'd like to ask you some questions," she said at last, turning her face to him. "If they get too personal, just say so."

"I've nothing to hide—worse luck." He tried to smile. "Anyway, we don't have those privacy notions on Mars. They'd be too hard to maintain under our living conditions."

"They're a recent phenomenon on Earth, anyway," she said. "Go back to the Years of Madness, when there was so much eccentricity of all kinds, a lot of it illegal—" She threw the cigarette to the ground and stamped it savagely out with one heel. "I'm going to forget my own conditioning, too. Ask me anything you think is relevant. We've got to get to the truth of this matter."

"If we can. I'd say it certainly was a thoroughly guarded secret."

"Listen," she said between her teeth. "my husband was Martin Donner. We were married three and a half years—and I mean married. He couldn't tell me much about his work, I knew he was really an Un-man and that his engineering work was only a blind, and that's about all he ever told me. Obviously, he never said a word about having—duplicates. But leaving that aside, we were in love and we got to know each other as

well as two people can in that length of time. More than just physical appearance—it was also a matter of personality, reaction-patterns, facial expressions, word-configuration choices, manner of moving and working, all the million little things which fit into one big pattern. An overall gestalt, understand?

"Now this man . . . what did you say his name was—?"

"Naysmith. Norbert Naysmith. At least, that's what he told me. The other fellow was called Lampi."

"I'm supposed to believe that Martin died and this—Naysmith—was substituted for him," she went on hurriedly. "They wanted to get me out of the house fast, couldn't stop to argue with me, so they sent in this ringer. Well, I saw him there in the house. He escaped with me and the boy. We had a long and uneasy flight together up here . . . you know how strain will bring out the most basic characteristics of a person. And he fooled me completely. Everything about him was Martin. *Everything!* Oh, I suppose there were minor variations, but they must have been very minor indeed. You can disguise a man these days, with surgery and cosmetics and whatnot, so that he duplicates almost every detail of physique. But can surgery give him the same funny slow way of smiling—the same choice of phrases—the same sense of humor—the same way of picking up his son and talking to him—the same habit of quoting Shakespeare, and way of taking out a cigarette and lighting it one-handed, and corner-cutting way of piloting an airboat—the same *soul*? Can they do that?"

"I don't know," whispered Rosenberg. "I shouldn't think so."

"I wouldn't really have believed it," she said. "I'd have thought he was trying to tell me a story for some unknown reason. Only there was that other man with him, and except for their hair being dyed I couldn't tell them apart—and you were along too, and seemed to accept the story—" She clutched his arm. "Is it true? Is my husband really dead?"

"I don't know," he answered grayly. "I think they were telling the truth, but how can I know?"

"It's more than my own sanity," she

said in a tired voice. "I've got to know what to tell Bobby. I can't say anything now."

Rosenberg looked at the ground. His words came slowly and very soft: "I think your best bet is to sit tight for a while. This is something which is big—maybe the biggest secret in the universe. And it's either very good or very bad. I'd like to believe that it was good."

"But what do you know of it?" She held his eyes with her own, he couldn't look away, and her hand gripped his arm with a blind force. "What can you tell me? What do you think?"

He ran a thin, blue-veined hand through his grizzled hair and drew a breath. "Well," he said, "I think there probably are a lot of these—identical Un-men. We know that there are . . . were . . . three, and I got the impression there must be more. Why not? That Lampi was a foreigner, he had an accent, so if they're found all over the world—"

"Un-man." She shivered a little, sitting there in the dappled shade and sunlight. "It's a hideous word. As if they weren't human."

"No," he said gently. "I think you're wrong there. They . . . well, I knew their prototype, and he was a *man*."

"Their . . . no!" Almost, she sprang to her feet. With an effort, she controlled herself and sat rigid. "*Who was that?*"

"His name was Stefan Rostomily. He was my best friend for fifteen years."

"I . . . don't know . . . never heard of him." Her tones were thick.

"You probably wouldn't have. He was off Earth all that time. But his name is still a good one out on the planets. You may not know what a Rostomily valve is, but that was his invention—he tinkered it up one week for convenience, sold it for a good sum, and binged that away." Rosenberg chuckled dimly. "It made history, that binge. But the valve has meant a lot to Martian colonists."

"Who was he?"

"He never said much about his background. I gathered he was a European, probably Czech or Austrian. He must have done heroic things in the underground and guerrilla fighting during the Third War. But it kind of spoiled him for a

settled career—by the time things began to calm a little, he'd matured in chaos and it was too late to do any serious studying. He drifted around Earth for a while, took a hand in some of the fighting that still went on here and there . . . he was with the U.N. forces that suppressed the Great Jihad, I know. But he got sick of killing, too, as any sane man would—and in spite of his background, Mrs. Donner, he was basically one of the sanest men I ever knew. So at last he bluffed his way onto a spaceship . . . didn't have a degree, but he learned engineering in a hurry, and he was good at it. I met him on Venus, when I was prospecting around; I may not look it, but I'm a geologist and mineralogist. We ended up on Mars. Helped build Sandy Landing, helped in some of the plantation development work, prospected, mapped and surveyed and explored—we must've tried everything. He died five years ago. A cave-in. I buried him there on Mars."

The trees about them whispered with wind.

"And these others are . . . his sons?" she murmured. She was trembling a little now.

Rosenberg shook his head. "Impossible. These men are *him*. Stef in every last feature, come alive and young again. No child could ever be that close to his father."

"No. No, I suppose not."

"Stef was a human being, through and through," said Rosenberg. "But he was also pretty close to being a superman. Think of his handicaps—childhood gone under the Second War and its aftermath, young manhood gone in the Third War,

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CHAPTER XIII.

poor, self-educated, uprooted. And still he was balanced and sane, gentle except when violence was called for—then he was a hellcat, I tell you. Men and women loved him—he had that kind of personality. He'd picked up a dozen languages, and he read their literatures with more appreciation and understanding than most college professors. He knew music and composed some good songs of his own—rowdy but good—they're still being sung out on Mars. He was an artist, did some fine murals for several buildings, painted the Martian landscape like no camera has ever shown it—though he was good with a camera, too. I've already told you about his inventiveness, and he had clever hands that a machine liked. His physique stood up to anything—he was almost sixty when he died and could still match any boy of twenty. He . . . why go on? He was everything, and good at everything."

"I know," she answered. "Martin was the same way." Her brief smile was wistful. "Believe me, I had a time hooking him. Real competition there." After a moment she added thoughtfully: "There must be a few such supermen walking around in every generation. It's just a matter of a happy genetic accident, a huge preponderance of favorable characteristics appearing in the same zygote, a highly intelligent mesomorph. Some of them go down in history. Think of Michelangelo, Vespucci, Raleigh—men who worked at everything, science, politics, war, engineering, exploration, art, literature. Others weren't interested in prominence, or maybe they had bad luck. Like your friend."

"I don't know what the connection is with these Un-men," said Rosenberg. "Stef never said a word to me—but of course, he'd've been sworn to secrecy, or it might even have been done without his knowledge. Only what was done? Matter duplication? I don't think so—if the U.N. had matter duplication, it wouldn't be in the fix it is now. What was done—and why?"

Jeanne didn't answer. She was looking away now, across the ravine to the high clear beauty of mountains beyond. It was blurred in her eyes. Suddenly she got up and walked away.

THERE was a night of stars and streaming wind about the jet. The Moon was low, throwing a bridge of broken light across the heaving Atlantic immensity. Once, far off, Naysmith saw a single meteoric streak burning upward, a rocket bound for space. Otherwise he sat in darkness and alone.

He had been locked in a tiny compartment in the rear of the jet. Wade and his entourage, together with a pilot and a couple of guards, sat forward; the jet was comfortably furnished; and they were probably catching up on their sleep. Naysmith didn't want a nap, though the weakness of hunger and his injuries was on him. He sat staring out of the port, listening to the mighty rush of wind and trying to estimate where they were.

The middle Atlantic, he guessed, perhaps fifteen degrees north latitude. If Christian's prognosis of Besser's reactions was correct, they were bound for the secret world headquarters of the gang, but Wade and the others hadn't told him anything. They were over the high seas now, the great unrestful wilderness which ran across three-fourths of the planet's turning surface, the last home on Earth of mystery and solitude. Anything could be done out here, and when fish had eaten the bodies who would ever be the wiser?

Naysmith's gaze traveled to the Moon, riding cold above the sea. Up there was the dominion over Earth. Between the space-station observatories and the rocket bases of the Lunar Guard, there should be nothing which the forces of sanity could not smash. The Moon had not rained death since the Third War, but the very threat of that monstrous fist poised in the sky had done much to quell a crazed planet. If the Service could tell the Guard where to shoot—

Only it couldn't. It never could, because this rebellion was not the armed uprising of a nation with cities and factories and mines. It was a virus within the body of all human-kind. You wouldn't get anywhere bombing China, except to turn four hundred million innocent victims who had been your friends against you—

because it was a small key group in the Chinese government which was conspiring against sanity.

You can blast a sickness from outside, with drugs and antibiotics and radiation. But the darkness of the human mind can only be helped by a psychiatrist—the cure must come from within itself.

If the U.N. were—not brought tumbling down, but slowly eaten away, mutilated and crippled and demoralized—what would there be to shoot at? Sooner or later, official orders would come disbanding its police and Lunar Guard. Or there were other ways to attack those Moon bases. If they didn't have the Secret Service to warn them, it would be no trick for an enemy to smuggle military equipment to the Moon surface itself and blow them apart from there.

And in the end—what? Complete and immediate collapse into the dog-eat-dog madness which had come so close once to ruining all civilization? (*Man won't get another chance. We were luckier than we deserved the last time.*) Or a jerry-built world empire of oppression, the stamping out of that keen and critical science whose early dawn-light was just beginning to show man a new path, a thousand-year nightmare of humanity turned into an ant hill? There was little choice between the two.

Naysmith sighed and shifted on the hard bare seat. They could have had the decency to give him some clothes and a cigarette—a sandwich at the very least. Only, of course, the idea was to break down his morale as far as possible.

He tried again, for the thousandth time, to evaluate the situation, but there were too many unknowns and intangibles. It would be stupid to insist that tonight was a crisis point in human history. It could be—then again, if this attempt of the Brotherhood ended in failure, if the Brothers themselves were all hunted down, there might come some other chance, some compensating factor—*Might!* But passive reliance on luck was ruin.

And in any case, he thought bleakly, tonight would surely decide the fate of Norbert Naysmith.

The jet slanted downward, slowing as

it wailed out of the upper air. Naysmith leaned against the wall, gripping the edge of the port with manacled hands, and peered below. Moonlight washed a great rippling mass of darkness, and in the center of it something which rose like a metal cliff.

A sea station!

I should have guessed it, thought Naysmith wildly. His brain felt hollow and strange. *The most logical place, accessible, mobile, under the very nose of the world but hidden all the same. I imagine the Service has considered this possibility—only how could it check all the sea stations in existence? It isn't even known how many there are.*

This one lay amidst acres of floating weed. Probably one of the specially developed sea plants with which it was hoped to help feed an over-crowded planet; or maybe this place passed itself off as an experiment station working to improve the growth. In either case, ranch or laboratory, Naysmith was sure that its announced activities were really carried out, that there was a complete working staff with all equipment and impeccable dossiers. The gang's headquarters would be underneath, in the submerged bowels of the station.

An organization like this had to parallel its enemy in most respects. Complex and world-wide—no, System-wide, if it really included Pilgrim fanatics who wanted to take over all Mars—it would have to keep extensive records, have some kind of communications center—*This is it! This is their brain!*

The shiver of excitement faded into a

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hard subsurface tingle. A dead man had no way of relaying his knowledge to Fourre.

There was a landing platform at one end of the great floating structure. The pilot brought his jet down to a skillful rest, cut the motors, and let silence fall. Naysmith heard the deep endless voice of the sea, rolling and washing against the walls. He wondered how far it was to the next humanity. Far indeed. Perhaps they were beyond the edge of death.

The door opened and light filtered into the compartment. "All right, Naysmith," said the guard. "Come along."

Obediently, the Un-man went out between his captors to stand on the platform. It was floodlit, cutting off the view of the ocean surging twenty or thirty feet under its rails. The station superstructure, gymbal-mounted and gyro-stabilized above its great caissons, wouldn't roll much even in the heaviest weather. There were two other jets standing nearby. No sign of armament, though Naysmith was sure that missile tubes were here in abundance and that each mechanic carried a gun.

The wind was chill on his body as he was led toward the main cabin. Wade strode ahead of him, cloak flapping wildly in the flowing, murmuring night. To one side, Naysmith saw Borrow's stiff white face and the sunken expressionlessness of Lewin. Perhaps those two would be allowed to work him over.

They entered a short hallway. At the farther end, Wade pressed his hand to a scanner. A panel slid back in front of an elevator cage. "In," grunted one of the S-men.

Naysmith stood quietly, hemmed into a corner by the wary bodies of his guards. He saw that Borrow and Jennings were shivering with nervous tension. A little humorless smile twisted his mouth. Whatever else happened, the Brotherhood had certainly given the enemy a jolt.

The elevator sighed to a halt. Naysmith was led out, down a long corridor lined with doors. One of them stood ajar, and he saw walls covered with micro-file cabinets—yes, this must be their archive. A besmoked man went the other way, carrying a computer tape. Unaided human brains were no longer enough even for

those who would overthrow society. Too big, too big.

At the end of the hall, Naysmith was ushered into a large room. It was almost as if he were back in Wade's torture chamber—the same bright lights, the same muffling walls, the same instruments of inquisition. His eyes swept its breadth until they rested on the three men who sat behind a rack of neuroanalyzers.

The Brothers could tell each other apart—there were enough subtle environmental differences for that. Naysmith recognized Lampi, who seemed undamaged except for a black eye; he must have been taken directly here on orders. There was also Carlos Martinez of Guatemala, whom he had met before, and a third man whom he didn't recognize but who was probably South American.

They smiled at him, and he smiled back. Four pairs of blue eyes looked out of the same lean muscular faces, four blond heads nodded, four brains flashed the same intangible message: *You too, my Brother? Now we must endure.*

Naysmith was strapped in beside Martinez. He listened to Wade, speaking to Lucientes who had been suspected of being the Argentine sector chief of the rebels: "Besser hasn't come yet?"

"No, he is on the way. He should be here very soon."

Besser is the real head, then, the organizing brain—and he is on his way! The four Brothers held themselves rigid, four identical faces staring uncannily ahead, not daring to move or exchange a glance. *Besser is coming!*

Wade took a restless turn about the room. "It's a weird business," he said thinly. "I'm not sure I like the idea of having all four together—in this very place."

"What can they do?" shrugged Lucientes. "My men captured Villareal here in Buenos Aires yesterday. He had been an artist—supposedly—and dropped out of sight when word first came about a fugitive Un-man answering that description. But he made a childish attempt to get back to his apartment and was arrested without difficulty. Martinez was obtained in Panama City with equal ease. If they are that incompetent—"

"But they aren't! They're anything but!" Wade glared at the prisoners. "This was done on purpose, I tell you. Why?"

"I already said—" Naysmith and Villareal spoke almost simultaneously. They stopped, and the Argentine grinned and closed his mouth. "I told you," Naysmith finished. "We wanted to bargain. There was no other quick and expedient way of making the sort of contact we needed."

"Were four of you needed?" snapped Wade. "Four valuable men?"

"Perhaps not so valuable," said Lewin quietly. "Not if there are—any number of them still at large."

"They are not supernatural!" protested Lucientes. "They are flesh and blood—they can feel pain, and cannot break handcuffs. I know! Nor are they telepaths or anything equally absurd. They are—" His voice faltered.

"Yes?" challenged Wade. "They are what?"

Naysmith drew into himself. There was a moment of utter stillness. Only the heavy breathing of the captors—the captors half terrified by an unknown, and all the more vicious and deadly because of that—had voice.

The real reason was simple, thought Naysmith—so simple that it defeated those tortuous minds. It had seemed reasonable, and Christian's logic had confirmed the high probability, that one man identical with the agent who had been killed would be unsettling enough, and that four of them, from four different countries, would imply something so enormous that the chief conspirator would want them all together in his own strongest and most secret place—that he himself would want to be there at the questioning.

Only—what happened next?

"They aren't human!" Borrow's voice was shrill and wavering. "They can't be—not four or five or a thousand identical men. The U.N. has its own laboratories, Fourre could easily have had secret projects carried out—"

"So?" Lewin's eyes blinked sardonically at the white face.

"So they're robots . . . androids . . . synthetic life . . . whatever you want to call it. Test-tube monsters!"

Lewin shook his head, grimly. "That's too big a stride forward," he said. "Science—no human science will be able to do that for centuries to come. You don't appreciate the complexity of a living human being—and all our best efforts haven't yet synthesized even one functioning cell. I admit these fellows have something—superhuman—about them. They've done incredible things. But they can't be robots. It isn't humanly possible."

"Humanly!" screamed Borrow. "Is man the only scientific race in the universe? How about creatures from the stars? Who's the real power behind the U.N.?"

"That will do," snapped Wade. "We'll find all this out pretty soon." His look fastened harsh on Naysmith. "Let's forget this stupid talk of bargaining. There can be no compromise until one or the other party is done for."

That's right. The same thought quivered in four living brains.

"I—" Wade stopped and swung toward the door. It opened for two men who entered.

One was Arnold Besser. He was a small man, fine-boned, dark-haired, still graceful at seventy years of age. There was a flame in him that burned past the drab plainness of his features, the eerie light of fanaticism deep within his narrow skull. He nodded curtly to the greetings and stepped briskly forward. His attendant came after, a big and powerful man in chauffeur's uniform, cat-quiet, his face rugged and expressionless.

Only . . . only . . . Naysmith's heart leaped wildly within him. He looked away from the chauffeur-guard, up into the eyes of Arnold Besser.

"Now, then." The chief stood before his prisoners, hands on hips, staring impersonally at them but with a faint shiver running beneath his pale skin. "I want to know you people's real motive in giving yourselves up. I've studied your 'vised dossiers, such as they are, on the way here, so you needn't repeat the obvious. I want to know everything else."

"The quality of mercy is not strained—" murmured Lampi. Naysmith's mind continued the lovely words. He needed their comfort, for here was death.

"The issues are too large and urgent for sparring," said Besser. There was a chill in his voice as he turned to Lewin. "We have four of them here, and presumably each of them knows what the others know. So we can try four different approaches. Suggestions?"

"Lobotomy on one," answered the physician promptly. "We can remove that explosive detonator at the same time, of course. But it will take a few days before he can be questioned, even under the best conditions, and perhaps there has been some precaution taken so that the subject will die. We can try physical methods immediately on two of them, in the presence of each other. We had better save a fourth—just in case."

"Very well." Besser's gaze went to a white-jacketed man behind the prisoners. "You are the surgeon here. Take one away and get to work on his brain."

The doctor nodded and began to wheel Martinez's chair out of the room. Lewin started a chlorine generator. The chauffeur-guard leaned against a table, watching with flat blank eyes.

The end? Good night, then, world, sun and moon and wind in the heavens, good night, Jeanne.

A siren hooted. It shrilled up and down a saw-edged scale, ringing in metal and glass and human bones. Besser whirled toward a communicator. Wade stood heavy and paralyzed. Jennings screamed.

The room shivered, and they heard the dull crumping of an explosion. The door opened and a man stumbled in, shouting something. His words drowned in the rising whistle and bellow of rocket missiles.

Suddenly there was a magnum gun in the chauffeur's hand. It spewed a rain of slugs as he crouched, swinging it around the chamber. Naysmith saw Besser's head explode. Two of the guards had guns halfway out when the chauffeur cut them down.

The communicator chattered up on the wall, screaming something hysterical about an air attack. The chauffeur was already across to the door switch. He closed and locked the barrier, jumped over Wade's body, and grabbed for a

surgical saw. It bit at the straps holding Naysmith, drawing a little blood. Lampi, Martinez, and Villareal were whooping aloud.

The chauffeur spoke in rapid Brazilo-Portuguese: "I'll get you free. Then take some weapons and be ready to fight. They may attack us in here, I don't know. But there will be paratroops landing as soon as our air strength has reduced their defenses. We should be able to hold out till then."

It had worked. The incredible, desperate, precarious plan had worked. Besser, in alarm and uncertainty, had gone personally to his secret headquarters. He had been piloted by his trusted gunman as usual. Only—Fourre's office would long have known about that pilot, studied him, prepared a surgically disguised duplicate from a Brazilian Un-man and held this agent in reserve. When Christian's message came, the chauffeur had been taken care of and the Un-man had replaced him—and been able to slip a radio tracer into Besser's jet—a tracer which the Rio-based U.N. police had followed.

And now they had the base!

Naysmith flung himself out of the chair and snatched a gun off the floor. He exchanged a glance with his rescuer, a brief warm glance of kinship and comradeship and belongingness. Even under the disguise and the carefully learned mannerisms, there had been something intangible which he had known—or was it only the fact that the deliverer had moved with such swift and certain decision?

"Yes," said the Brazilian unnecessarily. "I, too, am a Brother."

CHAPTER XIV.

THERE was one morning when Naysmith came out of his tent and walked down to the sea. This was in North-west National Park, the new preserve which included a good stretch of Oregon's lovely coast. He had come for a rest and solitude, to do some thinking which seemed to lead nowhere, and had stayed longer than he intended. There was peace here—in the great rocky stretch of land, the little sandy nooks between, the huge gray loneliness of ocean, and the forest and

mountains behind. Not many people were in the park now, and he had pitched his tent remote from the camping grounds anyway.

It was over. The job was finished. With the records of Besser's headquarters for clues and proof, Fourre had been in a position to expose the whole rotten conspiracy. Nobody had cared much about the technical illegality of his raid. Several governments fell—the Chinese had a spectacularly bloody end—and were replaced with men closer to sanity. Agents had been weeded out of every regime—even in America, Hessling was in jail and there was talk of disbanding Security altogether. The U.N. had a renewed prestige and power, a firmer allegiance from the peoples of the world. Happy ending?

No. Because it was a job which never really ended. The enemy was old and strong and crafty, it took a million forms and it could never quite be slain. For it was man himself—the darkness and madness and sorrow of the human soul, the revolt of a primitive animal against the unnatural and precarious state called civilization and freedom. Somebody would try again. His methods would be different, he might not have the same avowed goal, but he would be the enemy and the watchers would have to break him. *And who shall watch the watchmen?*

Security was a meaningless dream. There was no stability except in death. Peace and happiness were not a reward to be earned, but a state to be maintained with unending toil and grief.

Naysmith's thinking at the moment concerned personal matters. But there didn't seem to be any answer except the one gray command: Endure.

He crossed the beach, slipping on rocks and swearing at the chill damp wind. His plunge into the water was an icy shock which only faded with violent swimming. But when he came out, he was tingling with a sharp-edged wakefulness.

Romeo, he thought, toweling himself vigorously, *was an ass. Psychological troubles are no excuse for losing your appetite. In fact, they should heighten the old reliable animal pleasures. Mercutio was the real hero of that play.*

He picked his way toward the tent,

thinking of bacon and eggs. As he mounted the steep, rocky bank, he paused, scowling. A small airboat had landed next to his own. When he saw the figure which stood beside it, he broke into a run.

Jeanne Donner waited for him, gravely as a child. When he stood before her, she met his gaze steadily, mute, and it was he who looked away.

"How did you find me?" he whispered at last. He thought the fury of his heart-beat must soon break his ribs. "I dropped out of sight pretty thoroughly."

"It wasn't easy," she answered smiling a little. "After the U.N. pilot took us back to the States I pestered the life out of everyone concerned. Finally one of them forgot privacy laws and told me—I suppose on the theory that you would take care of the nuisance. I've been landing at every isolated spot in the park for the last two days. I knew you'd want to be alone."

"Rosenberg—?"

"He agreed to accept hypno-conditioning for a nice payment—since he was sure he'd never learn the secret anyway. Now he's forgotten that there ever was another Stefan Rostomily. I refused, of course."

"Well—" His voice trailed off. Finally he looked at her again and said harshly: "Yes, I've played a filthy trick on you. The whole Service has, I guess. Only it's a secret which men have been killed for learning."

She smiled again, looking up at him with a lilting challenge in her eyes. "Go ahead," she invited.

His hands dropped. "No. You've got a right to know this. I should never have . . . oh, well, skip it. We aren't complete fanatics. An organization which drew the line nowhere in reaching its aims wouldn't be worth having around."

"Thank you," she breathed.

"Nothing to thank me for. You've probably guessed the basis of the secret already, if you know who Rostomily was."

"And what he was. Yes, I think I know. But tell me."

"They needed a lot of agents for the Service—agents who could meet specifications. Somebody got acquainted with

Rostomily while he was still on Earth. He himself wasn't trained, or interested in doing such work, but his heredity was wanted—the pattern of genes and chromosomes. Fourre had organized his secret research laboratories—it wasn't hard to do, in the chaos of the Years of Madness. Exogenesis of a fertilized ovum was already an accomplished fact. It was only one step further to take a few complete cells from Rostomily and use them as . . . as a chromosome source for undifferentiated human tissue. Proteins are autocatalytic, you know, and a gene is nothing but a set of giant protein molecules.

"We . . . we Brothers, all of us—we're completely human. Except that our hereditary pattern is derived entirely from one person instead of from two and, therefore, duplicates its prototype exactly. There are thousands of us by now, scattered around the Solar System. I'm one of the oldest. There are younger ones coming up to carry on."

"Exogenesis—" She couldn't repress a slight shudder.

"It has a bad name, yes. But that was only because of the known experiments which were performed, with all their vicious prenatal probing. Naturally that would produce psychotics. *Our* artificial wombs are safer and more serene even than the natural kind."

She nodded then, the dark wings of her hair falling past the smooth ivory planes of her cheeks. "I understand. I see how it must be—you can tell me the details later. And I see why. Fourre needed supermen. The world was too chaotic and violent—it still is—for anything less than a brotherhood of supermen."

"Oh—look now!"

"No, I mean it. You aren't the entire Service, or even a majority of it. But you're the crack agents, the sword-hand—" Suddenly she smiled, lighting up the whole universe, and gripped his arm. Her fingers were cool and slender against his flesh. "And how wonderful it is! Remember . . . remember *King Henry the Fifth*?"

The words whispered from him:

*"And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by,
From this day to the ending of the world,
But we in it shall be remembered—
We few, we happy few, we band of brothers—"*

After a long moment, he added wryly: "But we can't look for fame. Not for a long time yet. The first requirements of a secret agent is secrecy, and if it were known that our kind exists half our usefulness would be gone."

"Oh, yes. I understand." She stood quiet for a while. The wind blew her dress and hair about her, fluttering them against the great clean expanse of sea and forest and sky.

"What are you going to do now?" she asked.

"I'm not sure. Naturally, we'll have to kill the story of a wanted murderer answering our description. That won't be hard. We'll announce his death resisting arrest, and after that . . . well, people forget. In a year or two it will all be gone. But of course several of us, myself included, will need new identities, have to move to new homes. I've been thinking of New Zealand."

"And it will go on—your work will go on. Aren't you ever lonely?"

He nodded, then tried to grin. "But let's not go on a crying jag. Come on and have breakfast with me."

"No . . . wait." She drew him back and made him face her. "Tell me—I want the truth now. You said, the last time, that you loved me. Was that true?"

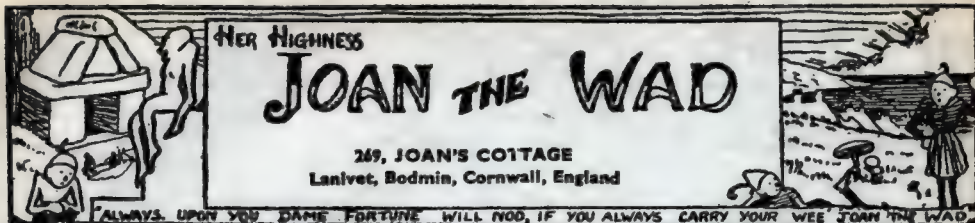
"Yes," he said steadily. "But it doesn't matter. I was unusually vulnerable—I'd always been the cat who walks by himself, more so even than most of my Brothers. I'll get over it."

"Maybe I don't want you to get over it," she said.

He stood without motion for a thunderous century. A sea gull went crying overhead.

"You are Martin," she told him. "You aren't the same, not quite, but you're still Martin with another past. And Bobby needs a father and I—need you."

He couldn't find words, but they weren't called for anyway.



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B.O., Tredegar, S. Wales.—Extract from "Everybody's Fortune Book, 1931."

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One lady writes: "My sister suffered very badly for years, but since I gave her a 'Joan the Wad' to keep near her she is much easier. Do you think this is due to Joan or the Water from the Lucky Well?"

AS LUCK BRINGER

Another writes: "Since the War my wife and I have been dogged by persistent ill-luck, and we seemed to be sinking lower and lower. One day someone sent us a 'Joan the Wad.' We have never found out who it was, but, coincidence if you like, within a week I got a much better job, and my wife had some money left her. Since then we have never looked back, and, needless to say, swear by 'Queen Joan'."

AS MATCHMAKER

A young girl wrote to inform me that she had had scores of boy friends, but it was not until she had visited Cornwall and taken Joan back with her that she met the boy of her dreams, and as they got better acquainted she discovered he also has "Joan the Wad."

AS PRIZEWINNER

A young man wrote us only last week: "For two years I entered competitions without luck, but since getting 'Joan the Wad' I have frequently been successful although I have not won a big prize, but I know that —, who won £2,000 in a competition, has one because I gave it to him. When he won his £2,000 he gave me £100 for myself, so you see I have cause to bless 'Queen Joan'."

AS SPECULATOR

A man writes: "I had some shares that for several years I couldn't give away. They were 1/- shares, and all of a sudden they went up in the market to 7/9. I happened to be staring at 'Joan the Wad.' Pure imagination, you may say, but I thought I saw her wink approvingly. I sold out, reinvested the money at greater profit and have prospered ever since."

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THESE SHALL NOT BE LOST

By E. B. COLE

EXPLORATORY Cruiser *Calimunda*,
No. 4735
107-463-578

From: Commanding Officer

To: Office of the Chief Explorer

Subject: Preliminary Report, Planet No.
5, Sun G3-4/572 GSC

1. The subject planet is one of fourteen in a system with a rather large G3 sun. Reports will be submitted at a later date on two other inhabited planets in this system.

2. Enclosures include Chemical, Geophysical, Biological and Ethnic reports in accordance with SGR 45-938. A brief summary follows:

a. *Chemical*: Subject planet has an oxygen-nitrogen envelope, with traces of other gases. Water vapor varies in its partial pressure over a medium range, with local exceptions. Presence in varying quantity of all natural elements was noted in the planetary crust and in the seas. No trace was found of artificial elements, their resultants or products.

b. *Geophysical*: Two major land masses were noted. These form large polar caps, extending well toward the equator, but are so broken up by seas as to form several subdivisions. Some islands exist in the equatorial seas, but none of these can be considered as important land masses. The planet has both rotation and revolution, with a slight axial perturbation. No satellite exists. The seas are tideless. The land temperatures range from approximately 230° to 395° absolute. Atmospheric pressure is 0.9 bars, mean, at sea level and gravitation is 960. Atmospheric turbulence is moderate. Precipitation is light over most of the planet. Some comparatively large areas ashore appear to have virtually none.

c. *Biological*: All life forms noted were on the carbon-hydrogen-oxygen cycle.

Vegetable life was found to be reasonably prolific, stationary in type, and re-

latively uncomplicated in structure, though taking numerous forms. Life cycles were variable, being virtually ephemeral in some cases and of medium duration in some of the larger vegetation observed.

Animal life proved to be varied, running from simple to complex in structure. Both warm and cold-blooded forms were observed in virtually all areas investigated, existing both at sea and shore. All animal life cycles, including that of the dominant species, were of short or extremely short duration.

d. *Ethnic*: The dominant form of life is humanoid, type 6.4151. Skin pigmentation is variable. Some inter-mixing of pigmentation groups was noted, but in the main, each group has its own area.

Civilization groups were observed in four areas. Civilization level was quite primitive, being on the imperial threshold. Centers of civilization were in the planetary semitropical bands in both hemispheres, with territorial extensions well into the temperate areas.

In general, the civilization observed are in the first stages of development. No mechanical means are used for power sources. Slave or animal labor is used in all phases of activity. Media of exchange are in existence, but no co-ordinated system of banking was discovered. Among the ruling classes, knowledge of mechanics or computational mathematics is unfashionable. Chief avocation appear to be literature, music, martial exercises and a sort of philosophy unsupported by research.

3. Recommendations:

It is believed that this planet is presently in a stasis, or approaching a stasis which may prevent further progress for several periods, and even cause lost ground unless assistance is given. Recommendation is therefore made that this planet be referred to the Philosophical Corps for further action.

Hel Guran
Comdr., ExpC
Commanding

Jon Dall
Capt. PhC
OIC, Team 6

3 Enclosures:

1. Chemical Survey, Form EC-107
2. Geophysical Survey, Form EC-232
3. Ethnic Survey, Form EC-296

Informal Report

From: OIC, Team 6

To: Commanding Officer, 7342 Philosophical Group

Subject: Initial check, Planet 5, Sun G3-4/572 GSC

1. Team six has set up a base on an island at co-ordinates 220.4070-302.0050. Pursuant to orders, observers have been sent to the four civilizations noted. Transcripts of observer reports are enclosed herewith.

2. As can be seen from the observer reports, the civilization centered at 523-4060-220.0060 is the probable dominant. Of the rest, one is so completely in stasis as to require long attention; the other two are so thoroughly lacking in desirable factors and so tainted with inherent weakness as to be inconsiderable.

The dominant is presently subject to powerful stresses, both external and internal. Complete collapse is probable within a period or less, and it is believed that this collapse would be impractical to forestall, due to the large number of unassimilated savage and semisavage tribes in close proximity to the Imperial borders, as well as to the serious internal faults. In any event, desirability of complete preservation is open to question. Among the internal stresses will be noted a strong trend toward insensate cruelty, sufficient to destroy most cultures. A long history of corruption in government and trade is also noted. On the other hand, governmental and legal structure are excellent, cultural level is good, and the arts and sciences are satisfactorily advanced. These should not be lost.

3. It is recommended that operators be sent in with a view to isolation and retention of worthwhile institutions and knowledge during the period of extreme uncertainty which will follow the collapse of the Empire. Provision should be made for possible deposit of further knowledge useful to the planet's future.

4 Enclosures

Observer Reports

7342 Philosophical Group

Office of the Commanding Officer

579.0352

From: Commanding Officer, 7342 Philosophical Group

To: OIC, Team 6

Subject: Operation No. 705

1. Informal report received and noted. The reports have been reviewed and forwarded. Recommendation is hereby approved and operation is designated as number seven hundred five.

2. Operation will be organized to conform with SGR 10-351 and Handbook PH-205. Control observers without recall will be sent in advance. These will act as foci in case modification of standard procedure is necessary, and may be used as operation assistants. Discretion is granted.

Coatl Myxlr
Col. PhC
Commanding

Gradually, the reddish tinge of the setting sun faded. A chill came into the air as the stars appeared and cast their feeble light over the village. A guard closed the gate, then returned to his game in the guardroom.

In town, a man walked by the houses. Unobtrusively, he opened a door and entered. Soon, another came to the same door. Another came, then others.

Inside, Master Operations Technician Marc D'lun glanced around at the group.

"Well, gentlemen," he greeted them, "I see you have all arrived. Are your integrations complete?"

One of the men nodded.

"Yes, they are," he announced. "I am now the tentmaker, Kono Meru. The records indicate that I am thirty years old. I was born in a nomad camp out in the hills, and am now an orphan." He pointed at another man. "Xler, there, is an itinerant woodcutter, named Kloru Mino. He's twenty-six. Both parents were pretty old. They died a couple of years ago. The rest of the section are nomads, herders, artisans, and so on. Records are

all straight. We all have a number of acquaintances, but no close friends or relatives."

"Very good, sergeant. The team's been setting us up in the meantime. Our operations center is in a cliff out in the hills." D'lun looked around the group of men. "Of course, you all know of Marko Dalu, the healer. Otherwise you wouldn't have found me. Records did an excellent job for all of us, but that's normal. Now, let's get to business.

"In the first place, the observers have given us a lot on this civilization. Zlet, you're Intelligence. Suppose you give us a run down."

Zlet, now renamed Kara Fero, nodded.

"The Empire has been in existence now for about fourteen centuries. It started with a rather small province, Daltur, which had a definitely democratic government and a definitely independent population. All inhabitants voted for every leader in their government. There was no such thing as an appointive or a hereditary job. In every decision of policy, majority ruled. They were surrounded by petty kingdoms, tyrannies, and the usual conglomeration of city states. The small seaport of Baratea became their capital, and as time went on, their trade excited the envy and very often the anger of their neighbors. Periodically, the Dalturans found themselves embroiled in wars, and they developed a system of military service. Many of their citizens devoted themselves to the study of tactics and military science, and it wasn't long before they started annexing other areas and cities. Pretty soon, they were too bulky for their old democracy. For a while, they fumbled around in their efforts to find a workable government, and it looked as though the Dalturan Empire was going to fall apart from sheer unwieldiness." Fero paused, glancing about. Someone held out a cup of wine. Fero nodded his thanks, and took a sip.

"Some of their leaders, however, were pretty sharp on civic theory," he continued. "They worked out a rather good system and put it into effect. Actually, it's a simple idea, but it has resulted in an imposing governmental structure. The

basic idea was that of a governing panel of selected persons, the 'Eligible Ones,' from whom leaders were chosen. By means of competitive examinations and contests, they selected the best of their youth. These were placed in training as potential leaders, and when deemed ready, were proposed for official posts. Only members of this panel were eligible for such posts. When not in office, or when training, they lived in simple surroundings, supported by the state. Popular vote placed them in office, and a system of electors was worked out to simplify the gathering of that vote.

"Nominally, this system is still in effect," added Fero. "The only trouble is that it's showing signs of weathering. Here and there, along the line, certain electors took matters into their own hands. Some of the Eligibles played along, for value received, of course. Appointive officials started appearing. A priesthood sprang up among the 'Eligible Ones.' Next thing, sons of the 'Eligible Ones' started taking their places among the governing group without benefit of the traditional selection. A few centuries ago, a hereditary dynasty was set up, supported by the priesthood, and the inevitable happened. The Emperor became divine."

Fero reached for the wine cup, took another sip, then continued.

"As it stands now," he concluded, "we have a sick Empire. The divine ruler is totally unfit to make the decisions required of him. A group of advisors have taken over the reins of government, and are running things strictly for their own profit and that of their friends. The average citizen has no more choice in government or even in his own fate than his cattle. Of course, he can still vote, but the results of the ballot invariably swing into line with the wishes of the ruling group. Our common citizen is becoming aware of the situation and dissatisfaction is spreading throughout the Empire. The governors and priests know it, but they are incapable of quelling the feeling. They can't return to the old uncomplicated days of the democracy and still hold their positions, so they depend more and more upon force and terrorism for their authority. Meanwhile, the outer fringes of

the Empire are under pressure from a number of unassimilated tribes, who have no desire to deal with Daltur in any way. The Empire will probably stagger along under its own inertia for a few more centuries, but the final collapse is already on the tape."

Marko Dalu nodded as Fero sat down. "That's the general picture," he commented. "Not particularly original, of course, but it's not pretty, and it's up to us to take action. Naturally, you have all studied the handbooks and a number of case histories, so I don't think I'll have to go into basic details." Dalu looked around the group. "We have about a hundred thousand people in this area," he added, "and about two sun cycles to work on them. We might get three. Sergeant Miller, suppose you go into individual assignments. I'll listen."

As Miller talked, Dalu sat listening and checking off points. Finally, he leaned back, satisfied. Yes, they should be able to collect at least a hundred and fifty useful recruits from this population. Properly guided, their influence should make quite an impact upon the millions within and without the Empire. Yes, he decided, between a hundred and fifty and two hundred should be a great sufficiency for the initial phases. Now, the only question would be to gather the right people, instruct them properly, equip them and put them to work.

"Of course," Sergeant Miller was saying, "these agents will have to have some sort of publicly known basic philosophy. Their mission depends to a great extent upon popular reaction and recognition. We can't simply tell them, 'Go out and reform the Empire,' and turn them loose." He paused, turning slightly. "That is Sergeant D'lun's department."

Marko Dalu smiled to himself. Yes, there would have to be considerable publicity, some of it pretty dramatic. Actions would have to be taken and words spoken whose echoes would ring through history for centuries to come. He remembered some of the melodrama that had been played out for similar purposes. "Hope we can play this one straight," he muttered to himself.

Miller finished his talk and sat down.

Marko Dalu looked up. "Any questions?" he asked.

No one spoke.

"There's one other thing," added Dalu, "the legal system of the Empire. Fundamentally, it's good. Simple, to be sure, but good. The underlying theory is equity, which is correct. Laws are quite easy to understand, reasonably definite, yet they admit of equitable decisions. The system of elected judges, public hearings and scant ceremony is worth saving. We can't say so much for the ecclesiastical courts. They are overburdened with ceremony. Bribery is altogether too easy and too common, and the closed hearings and drastic punishments are definitely undesirable. The same equity should be used in criminal cases as is at least nominally shown in civil affairs." He looked around again. "If there are no questions, I think we can call this meeting over. You can go ahead and start evaluating your acquaintances and making more. Shoot them into me as fast as you are sure of their potentialities. I'll screen 'em and pass them on to Base."

One by one, the men took their leave, and melted away into the shadowy street.

Slowly, the galley picked its way through the crowded harbor, edging through the narrow channel to the Baratea dockside. Already, the merchants were on deck, watching the sweating slaves hoist bales of goods from the hold. An overseer called time; an unimaginative man, he called with a monotonous, annoying chant. Below, the slow drumbeat of the oarmaster competed with him for rhythm.

Philar, master of the ship's guard leaned against the low rail, aloof from the activity. He was bored. He was also mildly irritated. Why, he wasn't sure. He was just bored and irritated. Nothing had happened this voyage to cause annoyance. In fact, nothing had happened this voyage. The normal, dull routine of life had droned on day by day, just as it had during most of a long career. There had been no attempts at uprising by the galley slaves; no pirate attacks; no adventures with marine monsters; nothing. Philar yawned. Looking across the harbor, he could see his favorite wine shop.

There, stories would be circulating of sea monsters; of mutinies successfully coped with; of pirate attacks skillfully repelled by bravery at arms. Old comrades would be coming in, their purses heavy with rewards, their armor renewed; some, perhaps, with new insignia of rank. He, Philar dar Burta, senior guardmaster, would merely sit. He would listen to the talk, and when questioned, all he could say would be:

"We went to Bynara. The merchants haggled. Some got richer; some got poorer. We came back. Have some wine."

Everyone in the room would shake their heads. Someone would say, "Good old Philar. Nothing ever happens. Nothing ever goes wrong. Now, the last time I went to Bynara—"

At a sharp command from the oar-master, the port oars were shipped. Slowly, the galley swung into the dock, to be secured by the shouting dockhands. A gangway was being rigged aft. Philar shifted his attention to the dockers. Good man, that dockmaster. His handling of men and materials spoke plainly of long years of experience.

Oh, well, thought the guardmaster. He had long experience, too. It was honorable service he had behind him, though uneventful. For forty-five years, he had perfected himself and others in the arts and in the ancient sciences of war and defense. From one assignment to another, he had gone his uneventful way, covering every corner of the sprawled Empire. Always, however, he had arrived at a new assignment just after the excitement was over, or he had received orders and left just before the trouble started. He shook his head. Funny, how battle had passed him by. Many of his comrades and pupils in the training fields and guardrooms had gone on to promotion and rewards. Others had simply gone. Here, though, was good, solid, old Philar; a dependable guardmaster, but somehow one who never wet his sword or did anything very remarkable. Even in his youth, during the war with Maelos, he had been assigned to the reserve which, due to the proficiency of the commanders, had never been called up.

As he gazed at the practiced move-

ments of the stevedores, they faded from view, to be replaced by other images. Again, he was an awkward new recruit. Daltur was at war. They were on the training field. The old fieldmaster who had instructed was long since gone, but Philar could still hear his voice; cautioning, criticizing, advising.

"You, there, Philar," he had cried. "Hold up that point. Hold it up, I say! This is no corn you're mowing now. That's a man before you. Were Holan there of Maelos, he'd be drinking your blood by now. Here, let me show you." Indignantly, the elder had snatched Holan's sword, turning quickly. A swift pass ensued. Philar's blade was brushed aside and a heavy blow on his helmet made him stagger.

"See, now," the instructor had growled, throwing the sword back to its owner, "that was the flat. The edge would've made you dog meat." He turned away. "Go to it again."

The shouting from the dock filtered through the guardsman's reverie, scattering the picture. He shook his head.

"Guess I'm getting old," he muttered. "Better retire to a farm before I get feeble-minded."

Truthfully, he didn't feel any older than he had when he came into the service. Men said, however, that one can only live so long. He knew he was approaching that age. Most of his allotted time had gone. Shrugging, he gazed over the crowded wharf. A courier was approaching.

The man drew his car to the gangway, tossed the reins to a dockhand, and came striding up to the deck. As he approached, he performed a quick salute.

"You are the guardmaster, Philar dar Burta?"

Philar nodded. "I am," he announced. "What have you?"

The courier extended a sealed tablet. "Orders sir. I await your pleasure."

The old guardsman's eyebrows contracted as he took the package. "What have we here?" he muttered. Turning, he broke the seal with a few quick taps against the rail, and scanned the characters impressed on the tablets within.

The first was the standard company master's commission.

"By the grace of Halfazor, Emperor of Daltur, First Prince of the Seas, Defender of Truth and Divine Lord of all Things living, know all men that, placing great faith in the loyalty, ability and wisdom of Philar dar Burtā, I present him as Kalidar of Guardsmen. All men and all other Things living beneath the heavens as ordained by the Divine Halfazor will then render him such aid as is necessary to complete his ordered course. All men under his command, or of inferior rank will unquestioningly obey his orders henceforth—"

It was signed by the Master of the Palace Guard, Milbar.

Philar looked over the tablet again. Yes, he had read correctly the first time. After forty-five years, promotion had come. Now, Philar was one of those who grandly crooked a finger for a car to pick him up. No longer did he have to walk the streets to his barrack. Rather, he would ride to his lodging. No more would he sit in the wine shop of an evening, listening to the boasts of those younger than himself. Rather, he would drink with a few of his own chosen friends in his own room. He shook his head, then looked at the other tablet. Here was an assignment.

"By the grace . . . Proceed to Kleedra

. . . Deal with rebellious elements . . . Bring offenders to swift justice—"

It was also signed by old Milbar.

Philar dropped the two tablets into his pouch, then leaned against the rail again. He looked toward the courier. His courier, now. By Halfazor! Rebellion in the Empire! Of course, merely a minor affair, but rebellion none the less. Most peculiar. Why, the Kleedrans had been a minor tribe in a little backwater corner of the Empire for years, even lifetimes. He could remember back thirty or more years, when he was on duty in the sleepy little walled village—fifty men, under a senior guardmaster. Even at that, it had been a soft assignment. He shook his head again, then turned sharply.

"Mylan. Mylan, come here, I say," he shouted.

His senior watchmaster came out of a hatch, blinked, then stood before him.

Philar put his hand on the man's shoulder. "Take over, friend," he said. "I'm giving you the ship."

Mylan frowned. "What happened?"

His senior grinned. "I just got promoted and reassigned," he announced.

Mylan's smile was slightly forced. "Congratulations," he said. Then, formally, "I hope I may serve under you later, sir." He gave a salute.

Philar nodded, returning the salute. "Possibly we may serve together," he

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gave the formal reply. He turned, and went down the gangway.

Mylan watched him as he climbed into the car. The courier snapped his reins and they were off. The new guardmaster leaned against the rail, frowning.

Why, he wondered, should they promote that soft, easy-going old fool when real men were around for the asking. He glanced down at his own trim armor, with its fine inlaid design. How much, he wondered, had he spent in bribes to the aides? How many times had he sent the Kalidar choice bottles? And then they promoted him an idiot who wouldn't unsheath his sword. Why, the poor old poltroon wouldn't even strike an erring guard. Had to talk softly to them.

He spat over the side, then turned, fingering his sword hilt. Well, anyway, things on this ship would be far different now, with a man in charge. He raised his voice.

"Turn out the guard," he shouted. "Get moving there. We haven't all day to clear this ship." Unsheathing his sword, he smacked with the flat at the legs of the guards as they passed. "Come on, come on," he urged. "On the double, there."

Plono Baltur shook his head as he looked at his tent. There was no question about it, long and hard use was showing. The tent had patches upon its patches. Yes, this man was right. He must do something about it, but there was the cost. He turned again. Kono Meru stood watching him.

"I am not a rich man," began Baltur. "My needs are simple."

Meru waved a hand airily. "No matter," he declared, "my tents are good. They last for years, yet the cost is low." Turning to one of his animals, he started unpacking a bale. "You will see," he said, "how strong material can be, and yet how light in weight." He spread the contents of the bale on the ground, whipping the expanse of cloth open with practiced gestures, and talking as he worked.

Without realizing just how it happened, Baltur found himself bargaining over the tent first, then talking of his personal affairs. Soon, they were talking of the affairs of the province, then of Imperial

policy. With a start, Baltur realized that he had bared some of his innermost thoughts. Dangerous thoughts, some of them, and these to a man he had just met. He swallowed hard, then looked straight at the tentmaker. What if this man were an Imperial spy?

His companion smiled gently. "No, Plono Baltur, I am far from being an agent of the Emperor." He nodded toward the herdsman's tent. "Shall we go inside?"

Baltur shrugged, held the tent flap aside, then entered after his visitor.

Inside, Kono Meru swept his elaborate headdress off, revealing a crop of black hair, surmounted by a golden circlet.

"First," he said, "let me introduce myself. I am known on this world as the tentmaker, Kono Meru. On other worlds, I have had different names." He held up a hand. "No, make no mistake about me. I am a man like yourself. Neither I nor any of my companions are supernatural. We merely come from worlds other than this one. Older worlds. We have certain tools unknown to your world, like this 'mentacom' here." He pointed to the circlet. "The device has a long, technical name, but we usually just call it a mentacom. It allows us to make direct contact with the mind of another being, making words unnecessary." Kono paused.

"We also have knowledge unheard of by your world as yet," he continued. "Possession of that knowledge has brought with it obligations and duties. My duty and that of my companions is to make worlds we are assigned to into better places for their inhabitants to live in, that the universe of worlds may prosper."

"There are, then, other worlds than this?" Baltur stared at him.

"Worlds beyond number," Meru assured him. "Many of them inhabited by men such as you and I."

"Why do you tell me these things?" queried the herder. "I am but a simple man. It is not for me to make great decisions." He spread his hands. "Rather, should you go to those who rule."

Kono Meru smiled. He had been right. The man had both mental flexibility and analytical ability. "It is our opinion," he

stated, "that those who now rule this Empire are failing to do a good job. You have agreed with us on that."

Baltur started. "I . . . I merely—"

His companion held up a hand, then pointed to the golden circlet. "You had the thought," he said positively. "Also," he added, "you said that men are not to be treated as cattle, thinking as you said it that in many ways, you and your people are being so treated."

Baltur paled. "I admit it," he muttered. "I had the thought."

Meru smiled. "How, then, can I go to rulers who consider men as cattle, and ask them to give those cattle a voice in the government?"

"I see." Baltur walked across the tent, seated himself, and leaned back against some cushions. "What, then, can I do? I am a herdsman. I have no great wealth, no power."

"Do you want to do something?"

"Yes, yes, I think so."

"You are willing to accept hardship and danger?"

Baltur shrugged. "If it will do good."

"Good. You will go, then, to the healer, Marko Dalu. Until you see him, you will forget all that we have spoken about." As he spoke, the tentmaker removed a small instrument from his clothing, pointing it toward the herdsman. "When you see Marko Dalu, you will remember your talk with me, and will ask him for further information and instruction." Kono Meru stood, walking to the tent entrance. "Now, I will help you set up your new tent, then we will part company."

The following morning, Baltur woke, feeling weak and nauseated. He stirred about the new tent, preparing his breakfast, then looked at the result with distaste. Finally, he tried some. It tasted terrible. He spat it out. Now, he realized that he had a headache. He thought back to the night before. No, he hadn't touched any wine.

"Something else is wrong," he muttered. "What was the name of that healer?"

He went outside, looking over his herd, then started making preparations for the trip into the village.

Nodan, aide to the Master of the Palace Guard, was a puzzled man. He looked after the retreating figure of Company Master Philar, his brows contracted in thought. Finally, he spoke to his superior.

"Why, sir? Why promote that man and send him on this assignment? Surely, there are others better fitted for command?"

Milbar smiled thoughtfully. "For instance, he inquired.

The smile made Nodan bold. "For instance, the senior watchmaster, Mylan dar Byklor, sir," he said. "Surely, there's a man who could take over a mission and make it successful."

Milbar's smile grew broader. "Ah, yes, Mylan. Makes up a nice bribe, doesn't he?"

Nodan flushed. His mouth opened, but his superior held up a hand.

"No, no. Don't worry. Of course I'm not blind, but I know that one must live. Why not a little on the side now and then." The older man dropped his hand, then played with his fingers for a moment.

"No," he continued, "this promotion and assignment is not exactly a reward. You see, the situation in Kleedra is most peculiar." He shook his head. "Most peculiar," he repeated. Really, it isn't a genuine rebellion. No arms have shown. None have flouted authority. It seems rather a change in attitude. Many of the townspeople and more of the country-folk seem to regard the Empire with a sort of tolerance, rather than with the normal respect. It is nothing we can put our fingers on. We can't declare a state of emergency, since there is none.

"It seems, however, that there is a man. A physician named Marko—Marko Dalu. He appears to be the central figure. People come to him from quite considerable distances, not so much for medical care as for something else. He goes out quite a bit, too. We've noticed that whenever he does, he gathers quite a crowd. Always makes speeches. Not much to them, but they seem to result in a very unsatisfactory attitude toward the Empire."

"But" Nodan suggested, "can't he be put in constraint on a treason or a heresy charge?"

"Oh, easily." His superior nodded. "Of course he can. We can arrest anyone for that, and in this case, we could make it stick." He paused, a smile creeping over his face. "But we want to do it in such a way as to be profitable." He paused again. "We must sacrifice troops to an unlawful mob." He beat softly on the table. "Our overlordship will be challenged." His voice lowered again, and he faced Nodan squarely. "Then, of course, Kleedra will be reconquered. It will resume its rightful place as a subject village, and all will be well again."

Nodan's smile was admiring. "A truly clever plan," he applauded. "And, of course, our Philar, the bluff old warrior, is just the man to make the plan work?"

"Naturally," nodded Milbar, "he will swagger in at the head of his reinforced company, full of righteousness and patriotic vim. He'll seize his prisoner and start out of town. Then, the trap will spring. He has never been in combat on the battlefield, nor have the men we are giving him. A determined mob will make dog meat of them; with some encouragement, of course, and at a price. After that, I'll send in experienced troops and take over the district."

Milbar leaned back in his chair, contemplating the future with considerable satisfaction.

It was a warm day. Back in the hills, a faint blue haze obscured details of trees and ground. On one of the hillsides, before a cliff, a large group of people had gathered. They faced a single man expectantly. He held up his hands for silence.

"Peace, my friends," he said. He spoke in almost a normal tone, yet those most distant heard him clearly.

Back in the crowd, among a small group of his friends, Plono Baltur nodded to himself. Yes, the mental communicator was a remarkable device. In this age, a public address system would be supernatural. It would be a strange device to be regarded with superstitious fear, yet the far more advanced mentacom merely gave a feeling of ease. It operated unobtrusively, without causing any comment, or revealing itself in any way. He looked

about the group. Yes, a lot of people were listening.

"Men have spoken words of violence," Marko was continuing. "This cannot be. Those who resort to violence will perish uselessly. It is only for those who abstain, who pass their days in peace who, with their sons, will inherit the future."

A murmur passed through the crowd. This was not exactly what many of them had come to hear. To a great many men in this audience, the stories of Marko Dalu and his strange abilities, coupled with his remarkable deeds, had come as a cry to action. Now, they felt let down.

"The rule of fear, of force and violence, cannot last," declared Dalu. "It must and will come to an end, since force creates counter force. It is not up to us to dash ourselves senselessly at overwhelming odds, but rather to practice and teach those virtues that have been handed to us from the ancient days, in anticipation of the days to come, when many men will also practice them. Thus will all benefit."

Gradually, as he spoke, most of his hearers nodded in agreement. Not all he said was understood, nor was it meant to be. Only a few men still felt a vague dissatisfaction. As the crowd broke up, scattering to various pursuits, a few of these approached the philosopher.

"You preach against violence," said one of them. "Then you say in effect that the Empire is bound to be destroyed. Who, then, is going to do this?"

Marko smiled. "That is not a matter for you or for me, my friend," he said. "The teachers say, I believe, that the Empire is ruled by the Divine Emperor?"

The man nodded. "That is true."

"Then," argued Dalu, "cannot the Divine Halfazor take care of the purging of his own Empire?"

The man was obviously not satisfied, but he felt compelled to agree. He cast about for some way to pursue his questioning without venturing into the dangerous grounds of heresy. Back in the shadows, a small instrument was leveled his way. Suddenly, he felt that he was wasting his time. Here was no opportunity to build up a case against this Dalu. He turned and walked away. The instrument scanned the group. Several

others decided that further discussion would be profitless. They left, to report another failure to their various superiors. Marko smiled at their retreating backs.

"Do you who remain have any further questions?" he asked.

One man stepped forward. "We do," he announced. "At least, I do." He glanced around at the three men with him. "I feel that there must be something to be done other than just passive waiting."

Marko looked at the four men. "Do all of you have that feeling?"

They all nodded. "I do," they chorused.

"Then," Marko added, "are you willing to risk torture and death for your beliefs?"

The men looked uncertain. "I mean it," Marko assured them. "If you join me, you will never gain riches. You may suffer hunger, thirst, torture, death. Danger will be your constant companion. You will be censured, with no chance of retaliation."

One man shook his head. "This is a dismal outlook," he announced.

"Yes, but one which must be faced," Marko told him.

The man looked at the philosopher for a moment, then turned. Slowly, he walked away. The others stood fast.

"I am a fool," announced one of them. "My better judgment tells me to leave, but I am still here. What must we do?"

The other two simply nodded.

"Follow me," ordered Marko. He turned, walking into the shadow of the cliff. He walked up to the cliff, then melted into it. The three men looked at each other, then shrugged. They, too, walked into the cliff.

Inside, they looked around in bewilderment. It was a cave, but the lighting was brilliant. Around the walls were arranged masses of unfamiliar equipment. Several men in strange clothing stood about the room. Marko Dalu was stripping off his robes. Now, he turned toward them, the light gleaming from his insignia.

"Gentlemen," he greeted them, "allow me to introduce myself. I am a member of a service which will remain unknown to your planet for many centuries. You have been chosen for that same service, provided you can prove yourselves fit

during the next few hours. I think you can." He waved a hand and one of the uniformed men pulled a lever.

Instantly, the lights went out. Images started forming in the minds of the three men. Rapidly, they saw the early days of a planet. They saw the gradual appearance of man, then his development to a civilization comparable to their own. Empires arose—and fell. Once, civilization was wiped out, only to start anew from the very beginnings. Machines were developed—machines which the men somehow understood, though they had never seen their like before. Wars were fought. New weapons were devised. Defenses were developed, then, new weapons. Lands were devastated. Finally, an entire continent was laid bare of life, but its final, despairing effort was decisive. As they watched, the immense forces interacted. Gravitic stresses, far beyond the wildest dreams of the weapon designers, developed. Then came complete catastrophe. At first slowly, then with vicious rapidity, the planet ripped itself to bits. As the images faded, a few rocks started their endless circling of the sun which had once given life to a great planet.

"That," said Dalu's voice, "was a drastic case. Now, a different picture."

Again, the images formed. This planet, too, had its wars, but after the fall of one civilization, international and interracial understanding developed. The wars lessened in severity, then ceased. Scientific devices, once developed as weapons, took their places in a peaceful, planetwide economy. The population grew, and, as

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life spans lengthened, the race spread to other planets, then to other suns. The images faded upon a peaceful and prosperous vista.

"The other side of the picture," remarked Dalu. "Now for the mechanics of the thing."

Hours passed. Finally, the three men walked out of the cliff again. Coming out into the blackness of the night, they looked toward each other wordlessly. Then, each engaged with his own thoughts, they went their separate ways.

Inside the cave, D'lun spoke to Communications Technician Elkins.

"Well, what do you think of 'em?"

"Looked like a good bunch to me, sergeant." Elkins turned from his instruments. "When do they come in for their basic training?"

"We've got a flight to Base scheduled in two more nights. These three bring it up to twenty." D'lun stretched. "I'm going to send them back for the full thirty days, of course, then I think that'll be the last class. We've got more than we have to have, really." He looked at the communicator. "Besides," he added, "that last message you got doesn't give us a lot more time anyway. This group may report back after we've left."

"Leaves it up to Baltur to break 'em in?"

"Baltur's a good man," remarked D'lun. "He soaked up instruction like a sponge. He can break these people in and run the operation nicely. 'Course, he'll have help and close support from Base and Sector for the next twenty years, anyway. After that, it'll settle to routine."

"Yes, Kalidar, we have a certain amount of unrest here. There's no open rebellion, though." The district governor frowned. "No question about it, this man Marko is a disturbing influence, but he's never preached revolt or sedition; on the contrary, he speaks of peace."

Philar leaned back, folding his arms. "Although my orders, governor, are not too clear, they do make definite mention of rebellious elements. Mention is also made of offenders. Surely some reports must have reached the Imperial Halls."

The governor nodded. "Of course. We

have naturally reported the trend of public thinking. In answer, you are sent. Now, we suppose the Imperial Guard will eliminate the cause of the disturbance. We will take care of other matters as they arise. Immediate action is in your hands, Kalidar."

"I see. You may be assured we will take action. Now, about quarters. I have a hundred thirty-seven men."

The governor arose. "Oh, that is quite simple. The old camp is still in very good condition. The village guard is using only a small part of it, so you may move your men in whenever you see fit. There is an excellent inn across the square where you may easily find accommodation for yourself."

As Philar rejoined his troops, he was doing a lot of thinking. One of those little hunches that had visited him so often during his years of service was gnawing feebly. No question about it, something was wrong here. Something more than a simple case of sedition, but what was it? He took possession of the Casern, absorbed the village guard into his own company, then called in his guardmasters. One by one, they filed in. Their commander greeted each by name, then:

"Gentlemen," he commenced, "we have a little investigation to make here before we can take action. I want your men to mingle with the townspeople much more than is usual."

Five sets of eyebrows raised, but there was a low chorus of acquiescence.

"Of course, any unusual comments heard, or any strange attitudes will be immediately reported." Philar hesitated. "Now, to my part. I want to interview a man, but I'm not about to just pull him in for questioning."

Dielo, previously the guardmaster-in-charge of the village, stepped forward. "Why not, sir," he queried. "We have nearly two hundred men now. Any insurrection could be put down easily."

"Possibly," agreed his superior. "Quite possibly, but why decimate the village unnecessarily?" He raised his hand as the other was about to speak. "No, I think I'll do it my way. Are any of our guardsmen feeling ill, or possibly suffering from the strain of our march?"

The master of the third guard smiled. "There's always Gorlan, sir," he remarked. "I never knew him to miss a chance to make sick quarters."

The commander's answering smile was understanding. "Good. Then let him take to his pallet, and call in the physician Marko. Obviously, this is a case for one with knowledge beyond simple camp surgery." He looked the group over for a moment, then, "You may go now," he added.

As the guardmasters filed out, Dielo muttered to himself, "Cautious old fool! Someone should make up his mind for him."

"Halt!" The command was sharp. "Guardmaster Dielo, I heard that." Philar's hand fell to his sword. "Were you one of my regular men, I'd merely break you and give you a few days without water, but you have been a Guardmaster-in-Charge." He paused, a crooked smile growing on his lips. "By the Emperor's sandals, I wanted a sick man. Now, I'll get one. Draw your sword."

Dielo's sword left its sheath. "Now, here's quick promotion," he exulted. "I'm a real swordsman, not a windy old failure."

The clang of swords echoed down the lanes of the old camp, bringing guardsmen at the run. The two men circled about. Slash, parry; slash, parry, slash. Stroke and counterstroke. Now a retreat, now an advance. No blood drawn yet. It was an exhibition of practiced and formal arms play. No question remained in the minds of the observers. Here were masters at work.

Philar was becoming annoyed. This man's boast had been partially correct. Surely, here was no beginner. In fact, this man was very nearly as good as that old fieldmaster who had taught recruits so many years before. Echoes of long gone lessons ran through Philar's mind.

"You, there, keep that point up. He'll drink your blood."

An idea came into his head. He had often wondered about it, he remembered now. Most unconventional, but it should work. What's to lose, besides a head? On guard again, he disobeyed that first of all maxims. Casually, he allowed his

point to lower below the permissible area. Instantly, Dielo seized his advantage. With a quick lunge, he beat down at the lowered sword, prepared to make the devastating swing to the head on the rebound. It was an easy stroke, and one which always worked, but this time, something went wrong. The lowered sword moved aside. As Dielo's blade continued its downward path, he felt something sharp slide under his kilt. A quick slash, and his leg became useless. He dropped to the ground with a grunt of surprise. Somehow, that blade which had come from nowhere swung over again, striking his sword hand. He lay weaponless.

The victor stepped back. "So," he thought, "the old, tried swordplay does have its weaknesses." He looked down at the victim of his strategy. The initial shock had passed. Pain was now coursing through the man.

"Please, sir," gasped Dielo. "Please, no sword art." He groaned. "Please make an end."

"No," denied Philar gently, "you are one of my men, and it is my duty to take care of you. You are badly hurt." He looked up. "Quick, Zerjo," he called to a guardmaster, "get the physician Marko. This is a case for his skill alone." He pointed to a couple of guardsmen. "Staunch me this man's wounds quickly, then carry him to a pallet. We will await the physician there."

Marko Dalu sat relaxed. Wine cup in hand, he was engaged in talking to a group of friends. Out in the hills, others were listening on their small communicators.

"Gentlemen," he was saying, "we have completed the first phase. It has become increasingly apparent that the only method of encysting the principles of government, art and science already attained is within a cloak of mysticism. You, therefore, will probably have to become the founders of a new religion. We will arrange a spectacular martyrdom of Marko Dalu, which may be used as you gentlemen see fit.

"Naturally, you and your successors will be visited periodically by members of the Corps, who will give you assistance and advice, but to a large extent, you will

be on your own. Again, I have to tell you, gentlemen, that this service you have chosen is a dangerous one. You are powerfully armed and protected, but there are restrictions as to your use of your arms. Some of you may suffer torture. Some may die. I don't believe, however, that I have to point out to you the importance of your work, or the fact that your comrades will do all they can to get you out of any danger.

"I may add one thing. If any of you wish to withdraw, the way is still open." He sipped from his cup, waiting. The communicator was silent. None in the group before him spoke. Finally, one man stood up.

"I don't believe anyone wants to quit," he remarked, "so I would like to ask one question." He paused, looking about the room. "We have been given equipment and knowledge that is far in advance of this world of ours. Are we to retain this and yet keep it secret?"

Marko nodded. "You have the knowledge of your world on the one hand, and the knowledge of other worlds on the other. These must be kept separate for many centuries. Advanced knowledge may be hinted at under certain circumstances, but the hints must be very vague, and the source must never be given. The equipment must be safeguarded at all costs. You all have demolition instructions which must be carried out at any hint of danger or compromise of your equipment. Does that answer the question?"

The man nodded. "Perfectly," he said. "I was sure of the answer, but I wanted it clearly stated." As he sat down, Marko's apprentice ran in, closely followed by a guardmaster of the Empire, in full uniform. The boy was nervous.

"Sir," he started, "A guardsman—"

Zerjo thrust the boy aside. "No need for anxiety," he announced. "It is urgent, though. One of my comrades is seriously hurt. We would have you attend him."

Marko arose, smiling. "You know, of course," he remarked, "I am not regarded with too great favor by the governor."

"No matter." Zerjo was impatient. "Men say you are the best healer in Kleedra. Tonight, we have need of such."

"Very well, then." Marko bowed. "Let us go." He reached to an alcove, securing cloak and bag.

As they approached the camp, a crowd gathered. An angry murmur arose. Marko stopped.

"Easy, my friends," he cautioned. "Here is no cause for disturbance. I merely go to practice my profession."

From the rear of the crowd, a voice called out, "He better come out soon, guardsman." Zerjo looked around angrily, hand going to sword, but Marko placed a hand on his arm, urging him forward.

"Pay no attention," he reasoned. "They mean no harm. It is just that they do not wish to see harm done."

"Yes," growled Zerjo, "or they want to start a rebellion tonight."

Marko urged him on. "There will be no rebellion," he said firmly, "tonight, or ever." They walked into the camp.

As they entered the barrack, Philar looked up. "The man's pretty badly hurt," he informed Marko. "See what you can do for him."

The physician knelt beside the pallet, his fingers exploring the wound in the man's leg. He shook his head. "It'll be hard to make that limb usable again," he said. "How did it happen?"

Philar looked sharply at him. "He talked," he announced, "when he should have listened."

"I shall take care, then, to guard my own tongue," commented the physician. He bent again to his work.

Philar stood watching for a moment, then, "I would have words with you when your work is done." He strode away, thoughtfully. Something was strange about this healer. Surely, somewhere, sometime, he had seen the man before. He cast back into his long and excellent memory. No, it was impossible, he decided. The man was no more than thirty-five years of age. That meant he was barely born when Philar was last in this district. Besides, he was said to be from the countryside, rather than the town or hills. Still, somehow, the man was familiar. He seemed like an old companion.

Finally, Marko stood up. "At least," he remarked, "the pain is eased. The man will sleep now, and perhaps his leg

will heal with time." He turned toward Philar. "You wished to speak to me?"

Philar nodded. "Yes. Come in here." He pointed to a small guardroom. "There are many things I want to ask you, and for the present, I'd rather speak in private."

He closed the curtains at the portal, then turned. "Now, then," he began.

Marko held up his hand in a peculiar gesture. "Awaken," he ordered.

"Now, by the sacred robes—" Philar's voice trailed off. "What did you say?"

Marko grinned at him. "I said, 'wake up,'" he repeated. "We've got work to do, pal."

Philar brushed a hand over his forehead. "Yeah," he agreed. "Yeah. We have, haven't we?" He pulled off his helmet, holding out a hand. "Gimme."

From somewhere in his robes, Marko produced a thin, brilliantly yellow circlet with a single ornamented bulge. Philar put it on his head, cocked it to one side, then slammed the helmet back on.

"C'm on, chum, let's take a walk," he growled.

A guard snapped to attention outside the portal. Absently, his commander returned his salute, and the two men strode out of the camp. As they left, Zerjo stepped up to his guard.

"What did they say?" he queried.

The guard shook his head. "Honest, master, I don't know. They spoke in some foreign language."

"Foreign language?" queried Zerjo. He looked at the guard questioningly. "Was it one of the local dialects?"

The guard shook his head again; emphatically, this time. "No, sir."

"Wish I'd been here," grumbled the guardmaster.

The morning was clear and hot. Philar stepped gratefully into the shaded door of the temple. Glancing about, he strode rapidly back toward the altar. A priest came toward him, hands outstretched.

"The benediction of our Divine Emperor be upon you, my son," he intoned, "but this part of the temple is only for the priesthood."

Philar looked at the man sternly. "You

are the head priest here?" he demanded.

"No, I am but an assistant, but—"

"Take me to the head priest," ordered the guardsman.

The priest turned. "This way," he said.

As they entered his sanctum, the head of Kleedra's priesthood turned angrily. "I told you I was not to be disturbed," he said imperiously.

The company master stepped forward. "I," he announced, "am the Kalidar, Philar dar Burta. I have come here to inquire as to why you have allowed a heretic and traitor to run at large for so long in your district."

The priest glared angrily. "You, a mere soldier, dare to question me in this manner?" he stormed.

Philar met his eyes with a level stare. "I asked," he said firmly, "why you allow freedom to a heretic and traitor?"

The priest faltered. Somehow, the presence of this old soldier put a fog on his normally keen, calculating mind.

"Why do you allow the heretic and traitor Marko Dalu to walk the streets of Kleedra?" Philar demanded.

"But, the man is a civil offender," the priest protested.

Philar snorted. "Has he not scoffed at the Divinity of the Glorious Emperor? Has he not hinted at higher powers than those of our temple? Has he not criticized the conduct of the temple and of the priests? And, has he not done all these things in public? His are certainly more heretical than civil offenses. It is up to you, and you alone. What are you going to do?"

The priest spread his hands. He knew there was something wrong with this conversation. He knew that there were other plans, but he couldn't think straight; not with this furious soldier standing over him.

"What can we do?" he inquired.

"First send your priests out among the people and have them denounce Marko as a dangerous heretic, an evil man, who would cause the destruction of the entire village. Go to the governor and demand a temple trial for this man. Have the priests hint to the people that if Marko is not delivered to the temple,



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pestilence, fire and the sword will surely visit them." He paused. "I can assure you that fire and the sword are awaiting any open disobedience," he added.

The priest lifted his head. "These things, I will do," he said decisively.

Philar, Kalidar of the Imperial Guard of the Dalturan Empire, leaned back at his ease in his own quarters. At last, this assignment was nearly accomplished. Soon, he'd be able to go back and relax for a while. In the privacy of his room, he had removed his helmet, and the golden circlet glowed against his dark hair.

"Well, Marc," he was thinking, "I'm coming after you tomorrow. How do you feel?"

"Swell," came the answering thought.

"By the way, did you run to completion on this one?" Philar asked.

Marc was disdainful. "Think I'm a snail? Great Space, they gave me almost four years. I had the job done in three. I beat it all through their heads, then clinched it on the other side. Picked up more recruits than we actually need for the job, too."

Philar started ticking off points on his fingers. "Philosophy, Ethics—"

"Yeah, yeah," he was interrupted. "Philosophy, Behaviorism, Organization, Techniques, Ethics, the works. I even got time to throw in a lot of extra hints that'll take two or three periods to decipher. They've got physical and biological science, up to and including longevity. They've got Galactic Ethics. I even slipped them a short course in Higher Psychology. 'Course, they'll have to do all the groundwork for themselves, but my recruits understand a good share of the stuff. When they're able to release their knowledge, this planet'll be on the team."

"Nice going, pal," Philar chuckled. "Well, as I said, I'm coming after you tomorrow, complete with a whole bunch of nice, tough Dalturan guardsmen. Hope your body shield's in good shape."

"You space worm," stormed Marko. "If you let those primeval monkeys get rough with me, so help me, I'll—"

"Ah, ah," Philar shook his finger, "naughty thoughts."

"Master Intelligence Technician Philar!" A third thought broke in sternly.

Philar groaned. "Oooh, I've done it again. Yes, sir."

"Attention to orders. After completion of your assignment tomorrow, you will march to the seaport, Dalyra. There, you will embark for the capital, Baratea. During the voyage, you will fall over the side and be lost." An impression of amusement intruded. "I'll be at the controls, sergeant, and for your sins, I'm going to bring you in wet. My friend, you will be so waterlogged that you'll be able to go without water for at least half a period."

"Yes, captain." Philar was doleful. He took the circlet off, holding it at arm's length and looking at it sourly.

"Thought control," he snorted aloud. "Thought control, that's what it is." He clapped the mentacom back on and composed himself to sleep.

Kloru Noile, High Priest of Kleedra, sat at his worktable. As he read, he nodded his head. Finally, he looked up. "Well, Plana," he remarked to his assistant, "looks as though the last of the despots has called it a day." He held out the paper. The man took it and read.

Informal Report

From: Barcu Lores, Security Technician
Second Class

To: NCOIC, Philosophical Section
5/G3-4/572

Subject: Duke Klonda Bal Kithrel

1. Psychological work on the subject is nearing completion. Bal Kithrel has decided to allow elections of all magistrates, as well as three members of the advisory council. He is also considering a revision of the property laws. It is believed that this is the beginning of constitutional rule in this area. Work is continuing—

Plana handed the paper back. "I believe, sergeant," he remarked, "that we'll get a good inspection report this time."